

INDIANA SUPERINTENDENT RESPONSE TO
INTERDISTRICT OPEN ENROLLMENT

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For Michael, my dad, who taught me to love learning.

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“Sustain me according to your promise, that I may live, and let me
not be disappointed in my good hope.” Psalm 119:116

ACSU

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Market-based education reforms have been implemented in many states with the intent of using competition among schools for enrollment and funding as a means of improving school performance. Indiana has employed a public interdistrict open enrollment program to that end since the 1990s, and 2017 program estimates indicate that approximately 50,000 students linked to over \$340 million in per pupil funding transferred among the state's public school corporations. This movement parallels other forces – charter school expansion, the implementation of a state-wide voucher program, and school funding changes – that have increased enrollment and financial uncertainty for many Indiana school districts. Past studies found that other sectors that moved towards market-based systems, like healthcare and transportation, mitigated similar uncertainty by using strategic management practices to align their resources for the sake of stabilizing their position and improving their competitive standing. Similarly, this study sought to identify the actions undertaken by Indiana school corporation leaders in response to enrollment competition from other public school districts and whether or not those responses resembled the practice of strategic management found in other sectors. An electronic survey was distributed to Indiana school superintendents and associate/assistant superintendents; responses representing 47% of the state's public school corporations were returned. Findings show that though actions varied based on the district's setting (i.e. cities, towns, suburbs, rural areas), corporation leaders' most favored approach to maintaining or increasing student enrollment was a reliance on communications-based strategies. Moreover,

though the practice of strategic management has helped both public and private enterprises respond to changing environments resulting from market uncertainty, only one-quarter of open enrollment participants and one-fifth of the study's total respondents reported having implemented a systematic response to market-based competition that mirrored the practice of strategic management. The greatest barrier to employing the practice was the failure to articulate an enrollment-linked goal as a strategic objective for the corporation. School district leaders looking to more effectively tend to market-based pressures for student enrollment should ensure that their enrollment goals and district resources are aligned in a context-specific manner.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Early in my career, I was fortunate to be mentored by a very skilled public school superintendent. I taught English in the district's high school and, when it came time for me to complete the practicum for my principal's license, he graciously permitted me to conduct a portion of it at the corporation's central office. The placement was somewhat unusual given that I was pursuing my initial administrative license, not my superintendent's certification, and had never served in a formal building-level leadership position. But the corporation had two characteristics – effective turn-around leadership and a high level of competition from neighboring school districts – that I wanted to observe more closely.

In its heyday, the corporation was something to behold. Its schools educated giants – world-famous musicians, the inventor of an artificial heart, a Nobel laureate – and had a rich history of academic and athletic success. A popular women's magazine had once profiled the high school as one of the nation's best and, though few would ever claim *Redbook* to be the go-to publication for highlighting quality learning, the distinction was something that many older residents still recalled with pride. However, accolades and successes began to fade as industry left the region. Fewer factories meant fewer jobs; fewer jobs meant fewer opportunities for a solid middle-class existence for many residents. Deep poverty set in and so, too, did changes in the local school system. Over the course of a few decades the local high school went from a national model to one from which barely half of students graduated. The community received national news attention again, but this time it was at the hands of a scathing report from researchers at Johns Hopkins University that labeled the high school a “drop-out factory.” It was in this context that my mentor stepped in to lead the corporation. And a few years later I joined

the high school's faculty to experience what it was like to see a school and corporation change from the inside.

As part of his tenure, my superintendent instituted a number of reforms aimed at strengthening the safety net necessary to provide students with a stable learning environment. He built community partnerships, instituted strict expectations for student behavior, and established a strategic plan to refocus attention on academic achievement. These steps coincided with a period in time wherein the district was hemorrhaging students to other school options. The county, with a population of under 80,000 people, had five public school corporations in addition to a parochial system that spanned K-12. Students had choices available to them and, barring an unprecedented renaissance, it was expected that the corporation would continue a cycle of underperforming and loss of public trust. And yet a renaissance is exactly what occurred. Academic indicators, namely student performance on standardized assessments, climbed steadily. Student discipline rates were cut thanks to concentrated attention to relationship building. A rebranding process put positive messages all around town – on bumper stickers, billboards, and the sides of public utility vehicles. Just a few short years after earning the “drop-out factory” label, the high school posted a 94% graduation rate.

One day, during a conversation with the superintendent, he spoke candidly about the nature of the corporation's turn-around. He asserted confidently that the presence of school choice, the simple fact that students in our community had educational options and were exercising their right to choose them, forced the corporation to become stronger. Had the market environment not existed, little pressure would have existed to improve. Anecdotal though it was, the superintendent's words stuck with me. As I've worked my way through doctoral studies and explored pressing issues related to school leadership, I've often found my research interests

highlighted by his words and my experience in his corporation. Part of it is intellectual curiosity at trying to reconcile the superintendent's assertion with empirical evidence that presents a decidedly less definite picture of how choice options impact change in public schools. Part of it is also most assuredly a response to the educative climate in my home state of Indiana. Hoosier politicians have given great effort to creating one of the most expansive school choice systems in the country. Indiana's one million K-12 students can opt to home school and unschool; attend a traditional public school of their choosing, a charter school where available, or a private school at public expense; learn in person or online, follow a traditional pathway or enter any number of specialized instructional programs identified as early college, project-based, or interest-driven. Indeed, in a state of one million school aged children, potential exists for there to be one million school choices being made on a daily basis.

Reflecting on my mentor's words, this study delves into one corner of Indiana's choice markets, public school districts and interdistrict open enrollment. The pages that follow aim to present a better understanding of the way in which public school superintendents are responding to competition from neighboring school districts. Chapter one provides an introduction to the topic. It outlines the background and scope of the research, the research problem and context, the research questions to be explored, and anticipated limitations to the work ahead. Chapter two explores relevant literature on the topic in-depth, with content subdivided into foci on school markets, studies of choice programs, and leadership. Chapter three provides an explanation of the research methods used to conduct the study, with a detailed description of both the subjects of the study and the instrumentation used to gather data. Chapter four presents the study's results with a discussion of the findings. Finally, chapter five focuses on a summary of the findings and conclusions as to their import.

Background and Scope of Research

Competition among American schools for students and faculty is nearly as old as the republic. Early iterations of formalized education often found local communities attempting to differentiate the quality of their schools and teachers from those of their neighbors by means of pay, curricular structure, or local support (Beadie, 2008). But it wasn't until the advent of the twentieth century that choice emerged as a broad social discussion on the work of schools. Martha Minow (2011) traces five time periods critical to choice development in America. Initial choice proponents emphasized identity issues, such as Catholic immigrants struggling to find a foothold in the face of strong nativist sentiment in the 1920s or Southern communities seeking to avoid court-ordered desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s. The argument for choice was appropriated in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of promoting integration of urban schools. The threads of these initial movements were woven together in the 1990s and early 2000s when choice was seen as a means of both promoting equity and directing public funds towards private religious schools. They took yet another direction in the mid-2000s as choice advocates proclaimed that the practice could promote pluralism and reform educational outcomes.

Each of these periods is distinct in its focus, but they are still bound together by a shared idea that the existing educational structure of the time was deemed ineffectual for some and that the best means of creating a better system was to create more options for students. However, at question was the means for creating educational choice. Could it be done as a public enterprise? Was choice better-suited to privatized practice? Might the two veins be hybridized? While scholars and activists put forth many potential frameworks, the most prominent to emerge took American schooling back to its roots by promoting free market principles as a means to proliferating consumer options in primary and secondary education. Milton Friedman (2002)

broached the concept of educational marketization with *The Role of Government in Education*, wherein he advanced the argument that government had overreached in its decision to operate school systems. He took no issue with the public financing of educational enterprises; indeed, he felt that there was strong justification for the government to advocate for and support an educated citizenry as a means of ensuring long-term economic stability. Yet he felt that government was wholly unsuited to actually develop and direct schooling. Friedman's vision of an educational system was one where government financed education and set forth mechanisms for minimum standards to be met but where the private sector would be responsible for running schools. In a privately run system, he reasoned, market forces would reward efficient, productive schools and exert pressure on weaker or poorer performing schools to either improve or fold. This, in turn, would create a better functioning educational system with improved outcomes for all.

Before moving forward, it is important to pause for a moment of reflection on what researchers have found in relation to market theories and the K-12 education system. Hanson (1992) held that natural market forces exist at a reduced level in schools, and that in the absence of pressure exerted by external competitors the greatest force incentivizing change came from parents who sought to influence the services and benefits derived from attending a particular school. Once external competition forced schools to focus on retaining or attracting students, change would only be derived from schools that sought to treat students and families as customers whose needs needed to be considered and met. Hanson also noted that most schools were unable to define a clear, delineated community towards which their efforts could be directed, so schools would be better served by focusing on market segments and target markets. Writing around the same time, Smith and Meier (1995) found that, despite choice proponents

often arguing that educational quality drives school markets, the performance of local public schools had virtually no impact on choice decisions made by parents and students. Rather, the two greatest factors influencing choice decisions were the availability of religious services and racial segregation. This aligns with Hanson's assertion that choice is dependent upon the creation of segmented markets. A decade later, Lubienski (2005) wrote that school reformers, seeking an instrumentalist view of choice, often turned to marketing to attract students rather than creating structural or curricular changes. Though the practice can lead to positive effects associated with a review of schools' mission and purpose, most often the students targeted to be choice participants are those who are already high-performing. This practice can often prove costly for poorer districts and schools, who on one hand have limited resources with which to engage the market and on the other hand risk losing their higher-performing students to competitors who are better financed or better organized. These studies, though not a deep-dive into economic theories or an exhaustive review of school market literature, provide some insight into the shape educational markets favored by choice proponents have taken. As will become clear throughout this study, the promise and practice of market theory are often two very different realities.

The preceding tangent aside, Friedman's market theories were an accepted part of the school choice rationale by the 1990s when, as Minow established, conversations among choice proponents began to revolve around finding ways to funnel public money for private educational programs. Indeed, a brief on the state of educational choice options from that time notes four favored arguments from choice backers: equity, local autonomy, family centrality, and competition (Larson, McCarthy, & Buechler, 1990). Of the four, three – local autonomy, family centrality, and competition – had clear links to increased marketization of schools because their pursuit was predicated on a radical shift of fiscal and operational control away from bureaucratic

structures and towards autonomous individuals. But excluding the presence of private school options, the choice programs proliferating then were variations on a traditional public school model. They included selective enrollment magnet schools, drop-out prevention programs, early college options, alternative schools for behavioral problems, and dual-credit enrollment opportunities. Such programs provided somewhat diverse options for students living in areas where these multiple school structures were available, but they did not embrace Friedman's publicly funded, privately operated model of optimal education structures. That move would take place in two waves: the creation of charter schools and the institution of educational vouchers.

Friedman's school policies gained little traction until ideas of school reform were elevated to a level of national crisis. The 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report served as the initial catalyst, using testing data and economic output trends to brand traditional public schools as failing to create a sustainable economic future for the country. This failure, the report said, posed a strategic risk to the nation's long-term position as a world power. The means for averting risk were seen as two-fold. First, the nation needed to move towards a standards-based accountability model for education that relied on regular assessments to illustrate student mastery of core academic standards. Schools and corporations that failed to help students achieve these minimum standards would need to be reformed. Second, remedies needed to be developed for low-performing schools that produced ill-prepared students or failed to graduate kids in a timely fashion. Many such schools were located in urban centers, home to largely poor and minority communities that were not being well-served by their public school systems. Framing school improvement as a moral and economic imperative, school choice advocates found a popular and relatively non-controversial solution in the shape of charter schools.

Choice advocates have three primary arguments for promoting charter schools: better matching of student needs to schools, increased innovation due to increased autonomy, and improvement among other schools due to increased market competition (Zimmer, Guarino, & Buddin, 2010). Based on these three principles, the concept of a charter is relatively straightforward. A sponsoring agent (a school corporation, a university, or a private entity) develops a school model outside of the traditional rules and regulations governing school corporations. Such schools would have greater flexibility regarding curriculum and instruction, school day structure, and teacher hiring. The school would be a public school, open to all and receiving funding from the state. Since the first charter school law passed in Minnesota in 1991, the practice has spread to 42 states (earlier efforts to use charters to skirt desegregation in the South can be found, but those attempts lacked the scope and codification found in the Minnesota law). Studies have found that charter schools, compared to their traditional public school counterparts, are more racially diverse and serve a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged kids, leading to claims about their ability to be a democratizing agent by providing poor families options similar to those available to the economically advantaged ((National Center for Education Statistics, 2015; Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). But for all their promise, charters resemble traditional public schools in their academic outcomes (Zimmer, Guarino, & Buddin, 2010). Some research has even indicated that a school's effectiveness has no impact on the presence or success of charter schools but that their location in socioeconomically low corporations creates a significant financial pressure within the most difficult educational settings (Ni & Arsen, 2011). There are even questions about whether charter schools can be an effective means of promoting equity given persistent problems of supporting public services (like transportation), information asymmetry, application requirements, mandatory parental

involvement, and even school curricular focus that can tip enrollment towards whiter, wealthier clientele (Minnow, 2011). Taking these points under consideration, it can be seen that charter schools began the march towards realizing Friedman's market theories but came up short in terms of providing a publicly financed, privately managed educational system. The remaining ground was closed by a second form of choice: school vouchers.

At its most basic, a voucher represents the transfer of public funds to private individuals so that the money can be directed towards paying for a school of the individual's choosing. The most ardent proponents of vouchers were individuals and organizations that sought to pair religious liberty debates with arguments for equity as a means of directing public funds towards private, parochial schools. The legality of this practice produced fierce opposition but was affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002). Voucher proponents herald this decision as much for opening the door to publicly funding private schools as they do the perceived social benefits driven by a healthy voucher program. McShane (2012) claims that voucher programs can be a strong driver of educational reform. Gottlob (2006) suggests that the increased access to choice schools afforded by vouchers raises local graduation rates and decreases public costs associated with drop-outs. The concept of fiscal impact has been advanced by others, too, with some emphasizing that vouchers provide tax relief benefits for families (Carpenter & Ross, 2009) and others asserting that they provide savings for states regardless of the level of demand for such programs (Stuit, 2009). To date, these and related arguments have led to voucher programs being instituted in 16 U.S. states, with an additional 13 states providing some form of similarly situated tax benefit for families that enroll in private schools (Friedman Foundation, 2016).

Despite these positive points, advancing voucher programs does not come without a cost. Rouse and Barrow (2009), though warning of the absence of long-term studies on vouchers, found the practice to have no statistically significant impact on improving student outcomes. In fact, rather than indicating improved academic performance, vouchers are better suited to tell us of an individual's religious affiliation or mother's academic background (Campbell, West, & Peterson, 2005). They are also linked to high mobility rates for poor, lower-performing, and minority students in some settings (Cowen, Fleming, Witte, & Wolf, 2012), indicating that there is still great room for improving vouchers' usefulness in promoting equity. This last concern – one of equity – is critical given that it is one of the two original arguments used to promote voucher expansion. If the equity argument is found to be a moot point, and there are indeed growing levels of evidence that such programs actually promote segregation and decrease equitable access to education (Minnow, 2011), then the advocacy of vouchers is left to stand on only the argument that religious schools should be beneficiaries of public monies. It is an argument that will surely find greater resistance in public discourse and legislative action than one advanced on the prospect of creating fair access to high quality education for all students.

Both charter schools and voucher programs have become a common part of the choice landscape, with an ever-growing number of states permitting their use as a means of K-12 education. Their potential for increasing market competition and driving discussion of school improvement makes them a favored topic of research and reporting. Indeed, the near monopoly they hold on the pages of research journals and legislative hearings and news coverage could give the impression that they are the only options available for increasing choice access for students. They are not. A third alternative, one with the potential to open access to a greater number of available schools than all charter schools and private schools combined, is available

yet oft-ignored. It creates market competition, puts school selection in the hands of parents and children, and can provide potential remedies to poor quality or inequitable situations in places where no charter or private school can be found. It is known as interdistrict open enrollment. Through it 46 states enable public schools students some degree of option to cross school corporation boundaries and attend a school that meets their needs (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Despite its prevalence, little research or acclaim is directed towards the practice. This study aims to change that.

Research Problem and Context

Indiana is a hotbed of school choice activities, receiving acclaim from school choice proponents like The Friedman Foundation for Educational Excellence for the number of options provided students and families. The state has permitted charter schools since 2001. There are currently 79 charters in the state, mostly centered in urban areas, which enroll a total of 37,448 students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Similarly, the state has an expansive, uncapped voucher program permitting 32,686 students to receive a combined \$53 million from the state to attend private or parochial schools (Schneider & Cook, 2016). These programs have stoked competition between traditional public schools and alternative settings that, in and of itself, has created a market-based environment historically absent in the state. However, competition in Indiana is not confined to the traditional-charter-voucher triad. It is likewise extended into competition among traditional public school corporations through the presence of interdistrict open enrollment.

Indiana has three forms of open enrollment. The first emerged in 1995 when legislation from the Indiana General Assembly implied the right of Indianapolis Public Schools families to enroll in a school other than that to which their child was districted. The second came as a result

of the No Child Left Behind Act, which permitted low-income students attending a school that failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress to transfer without penalty to a higher performing school. The third was codified in 2005 in Indiana Code 20-26-11, which set forth a plan for voluntary interdistrict open enrollment. Under the code, school corporations must opt to participate in the program and some, whether due to high enrollment or other factors, chose not to take transfer students. However, participating corporations are able to enroll out-of-district students who seek “better accommodation” by means of differing curricular options, smaller class sizes, or some similarly situated reason (Herrmann, Burroughs, & Plucker, 2009).

Prior to 2013, Indiana school corporations could set application restrictions on potential transfer students. Such restrictions might include clean disciplinary records, submission of transcripts highlighting past academic performance, and standardized test performance thresholds. Some corporations expressed concern that this process permitted districts to “cherry pick” the best students from the transfer pool, selecting only the most capable and well-behaved. In response, the Indiana General Assembly modified state statute to reflect that corporations participating in interdistrict enrollment must notify the state Department of Education with the number seats available for transfer students. Students who applied could only be denied transfer admission if they met a series of disciplinary restrictions, including prior expulsion, suspension for ten or more school days, drug or alcohol violations, or causing physical injury to other students or staff. Transfers for primarily athletic reasons were also verboten. Moreover, once a student was accepted into the transfer district, that student could maintain their enrollment until they completed their schooling, regardless of performance or behavior in the transfer setting. The law also permitted transfers of siblings of previously enrolled transfer students and children of corporation employees.

Though some school corporations opted to discontinue their transfer programs, many chose to participate in the program thanks to a powerful motivator: funding. Since 2005, Indiana has had a school finance system in which money follows the student. School corporations submit student counts to the state, which in turn apportions a basic educational grant for each head counted. When a student transfers from one corporation to another, the sending corporation loses money and the receiving corporation gains money. The basic foundation grant for each pupil has historically varied among corporations, though a leveling process has since been put into place. The 2017-2018 per pupil grant amount was \$6,614. Additional funds, be they related to special education needs or socio-economic status, can be tacked onto that price tag, too, making the recruitment of new students lucrative for corporations.

In addition to the funding portability mentioned above, Indiana instituted a series of tax reforms that resulted in the implementation of property tax caps in 2008 that were folded into the state constitution in 2010. The practice placed a limit on the amount of taxes municipal agencies, including schools, can collect on the gross assessed value of a given property. Local education agencies historically received a large portion of their funding from property taxes, so the shift in law had a great impact on school corporations. Indiana Public Media reported that the practice resulted in a statewide loss of \$245 million for school corporations in 2013. Corporations that sought to make up the lost revenue, which was separate from direct state aide, had two options. The first was to ask voters to approve a local tax increase through a referendum process. The second was to increase local enrollment and, in turn, increase the amount of assistance received from the state.

Taking the preceding points collectively – the mix of multi-front enrollment competition paired with funding changes – it is no small wonder that many Indiana schools have opted to

participate in interdistrict open enrollment. Data obtained from the Indiana Department of Education indicates that 149 corporations notified the department of their intent to participate in open enrollment for the 2016-2017 school year. There is some question about whether the list is conclusive. Some participants, including Indianapolis Public Schools, are noticeably absent from the list, making it likely that some corporations either failed to meet the state deadline for notification or never completed the notification process at all. Nonetheless, the reported figure represents 52% of the state's traditional public school districts with the potential to permit the free flow of approximately half a million students among the state's corporations.

How many students are crossing public school boundaries to attend an out-of-district public school? The data was not tracked from the program's state-wide expansion in 2005 through the 2016-2017 school year. However, the Indiana General Assembly legislated that the Indiana Department of Education compile the Public Corporation Transfer Report beginning in 2017, and the numbers are substantial. 99,840 public school students attended another public school, either traditional or charter, outside of their home district in the fall of 2017 (Indiana Department of Education, 2018). Of those 99,840 students, 52,052 moved from the traditional public school in their home corporation to another traditional public school elsewhere. Given the state's \$6,614 per pupil grant, this movement corresponds to over \$344 million transferring from students' district of residence to their district of attendance.

A glance at the report's data indicates sizable enrollment losses and gains across the state. Indianapolis Public Schools had 46,972 students with state funded legal settlement in their district but saw 4,408 kids, or 9%, transfer to other public schools. Gary Public Schools saw 1,266 students (10.5%) enroll in other traditional public schools. Union School Corporation, in the rural town of Modoc, lost 186 of 367 students; 51% of students with legal settlement in the

district attended a public school elsewhere. In contrast, Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation gained 1,680 students, or 15% of their total enrollment, from interdistrict transfers. Frankton-Lapel School Corporation picked up 786 kids from out-of-district (26% of total enrollment), and Daleville Schools added an additional 341 students (40% of their enrollment) from other public school corporations. In all, 175 of Indiana's 289 school corporations – 60% of all districts in the state – reported a net loss of students due to the state's interdistrict open enrollment program.

Local school boards, looking to capitalize on potential growth, are responsible for setting policy that permits interdistrict open enrollment within their boundaries. However, once that decision is made, no single individual has more influence on the competitive practices of the district than the superintendent. She determines the ultimate degree to which the corporation pursues increased enrollment, the level of aggressiveness with which new students are courted or the rate at which programmatic or cultural shifts are undertaken. She establishes the terms by which the policy is framed, guides the allocation of resources, and situates the practice within a portfolio of other needs and responsibilities. Yet what is unique about responding to this particular policy is that it has the potential to draw on a skill set likely unfamiliar to most district leaders. They have been trained on how to lead through uncertainty, how to set vision, manage human capital, and shape learning. But few leadership programs have historically prepared superintendents to analyze the competitive forces impacting their corporations or to craft plans to grow what is for all intents and purposes a market share of available students. As we look at schools engaging within education as a marketplace, of functioning in competition with a host of other service providers, questions arise about the types of actions undertaken and whether those actions reflect the practices of a business world more accustomed to direct competition. And it is precisely within these bounds – of a state with multiple, competing choice options, of school

corporations that have chosen to engage with interdistrict open enrollment, and of the leadership actions and decisions of superintendents in relation to the practice – that this study is situated.

Stepping back from the specific context of this study, we find that little literature exists on interdistrict open enrollment to help us understand the practice at the ground level. Journal articles on the topic are rare, and only a handful of published dissertations have been directed towards the topic. Minnesota has perhaps the best studied open enrollment program, with multiple examinations of how it could influence the K-12 landscape (Mazzoni, 1986; Witte, Carlson, & Lavery, 2011). Farrell (1994) explored the practice’s impact on student outcomes in Ohio, and Metzler (1996) looked at the characteristics of participating students and school districts in the same state. Stewart (2011) examined how New York used voluntary interdistrict transfers as a means of promoting integration. These studies are important, as they sought to determine whether open enrollment could have a discernable impact on the students and schools where it is available, but their emphasis on demographics and outcomes appear to pose the question “*To what end...*” without first asking “*In what way...*” They presuppose the practice to be monolithic in application, when it is very well possible that the specific practices employed related to interdistrict open enrollment might ultimately impact efficacy and engagement.

Turning towards leadership practices, Richardson (2013) looked into how Florida principals and schools employed marketing practices in the face of open enrollment, and Zywicki (2015) dug into New Jersey superintendent perception of the New Jersey Interdistrict School Choice program. Though Richardson’s study is notable because it looked at a specific type of business-related response at the building level, neither of these studies provided any insight into the manner in which district-level leaders formulated and executed responses to increased competition from other public school corporations. Both relied on presuppositions, just like those

studies mentioned earlier, and failed to provide a systemic understanding of what interdistrict open enrollment practices looked like in their contexts. To that end, it seems somewhat silly to study manifestations of a phenomenon without first understanding what the phenomenon looks like.

Indiana has a policy of interdistrict open enrollment that could, in theory, impact all public school corporations in the state and over one million school children. But research does not appear to be available on what the policy looks like as it is being implemented. No journal articles or reports are readily available to say what shape the program has taken, where it is being practiced, and how it is being led. This is to say nothing of questions beyond such foundational elements, like whether the program is having a discernable impact on improving equity or educational outcomes. Given the dearth of available literature, this study seeks to begin filling the present informational gap by looking at the lived practice of interdistrict open enrollment in Indiana.

Framework

This work is primarily a product of studies in school leadership and policy, but it attempts to situate that research in concepts from a decidedly different field: the business world's concept of strategic management. Contemporary school competition mimics similar forces found within the business sector. If theorists and reformers posit that open-market concepts are good for the K-12 education sector, and if school choice initiatives are driven in part by those same concepts, it appears a natural extension to determine the extent to which leadership practices from open-market contexts can be found in K-12 settings. To do so, this study will use the principles of strategic management as a framework through which the research is viewed. Greater attention to

this topic will be given later in the study, but it is prudent to provide a basic overview at the outset given the ties between the research questions and strategic management theory.

To begin, we must first determine what is meant by “strategic management.” Porter (1996) asserts that strategy, at its most basic state, is the creation of a unique, valuable position within a market. “Strategic positioning,” he continues, “attempts to achieve sustainable competitive advantage by preserving what is distinctive about a company” (p. 3). The question then becomes, how does an organization operationalize strategy in a market? Companies turn to the practice of strategic management. Montanari and Bracker (1986) find that strategic management “provides organizations with a framework for developing abilities and anticipating and coping with changing environments” (p. 252). It is a practice oriented towards aligning an organization’s vision, leadership practice, and operational components for the sake of competitive advantage. It permits the development of a unique and valuable market position that guides an organization’s operations.

Groundwork for applying strategic management to public service enterprises has already been established in literature. Boyne and Walker (2010) reviewed the public service sector’s use of the practice and found it to be “an essential tool to lift levels of organizational performance” (p. S191). Ferlie and Ongaro (2015) dedicated an entire book to connecting strategic management to public sector reforms and the contexts in which public organizations function. More relevant to the work of K-12 education, Fidler (1998) looked to the practice as a means for schools to avoid complacency and failure. Wechsler and Backoff (1985) note that the application of strategic management to government entities could prove somewhat tricky given that the theory had primarily been used in market-driven arenas decidedly dissimilar to public services. In this instance, wherein public schools have found themselves in a recently emerged market-

based system, the parallels are greater than they would be for other government services, like fire departments or natural resource agencies. Though not exhaustive, these sources illustrate that considerable thought has already been directed towards integrating public works and conceptions of business strategy. Further, if we return to the concept of education as a marketplace and to the competitive pressures felt by school corporations to retain or attract students, it makes sense to frame discussions of competitive practices within an established theory. Strategic management provides just such a framework.

Research Questions and Terms to Be Defined

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which Indiana's public school superintendents have responded to open enrollment. It seeks to understand the following:

1. What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?
2. Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation they lead?
3. Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?

In order to achieve the aims of this study, it is imperative for core terminology to be clearly defined. Doing so ensures some level of conceptual stability. To that end, the terms below will be defined as follows:

1. School Choice: the practice of providing educational options to children and families.
2. Interdistrict Choice: the practice of permitting children and families to choose schooling options in a school district or corporation other than that in which they reside.
3. Open Enrollment: the practice of permitting students to enroll in a school or corporation other than that in which they would be assigned due to residence.

4. City: A “[t]erritory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City” (NCES, 2015, p. 1).
5. Suburban: A “[t]erritory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area” (NCES, p. 1).
6. Town: A “[t]erritory inside an Urban Cluster” (NCES, p. 1).
7. Rural: A “census-defined rural territory” not covered in the previous three definitions (NCES, p. 1).
8. Strategic Management: a framework for developing an entities abilities for the purposes of anticipating and coping with change consisting of stages related to articulation, analysis, alignment, implementation, and evaluation.

Implications of the Study

This study is not focused on outcomes; it is not concerned with whether or not district enrollments increased or student achievement improved. Those are important topics, to be sure, but they are byproducts of the practices employed in response to open enrollment. Before we can understand whether or not open-enrollment has paid dividends for Indiana’s students and schools, we must first understand how the policy is practiced at the district level. To that end, this study will undertake a comprehensive quantitative survey of how superintendents are responding to increased competitive pressure from each other’s corporations. It moves beyond anecdotal comments about which corporations are participating in the practice and how they are doing so to cataloging both the type and level of engagement with this particular choice option.

The information derived from this study can be valuable for a number of constituencies. State legislators and policy directors can draw inferences about the practice’s lived reality as a mechanism for providing increased educational options for students and families. School boards

can weigh the practices of similarly situated corporations throughout the state as a means of assessing whether or not to engage with interdistrict open enrollment. Superintendents can look to the results of this study as a “toolbox” of strategies or as a primer for more thoroughly assessing the competitive environment in which they are situated. Even private, parochial, and charter schools could find the information beneficial in assessing how aggressively traditional public school corporations are pursuing the concept of education as a marketplace.

An additional strand of this research delves into whether parallels exist between the types of strategic management processes undertaken by school corporations in response to competitive pressures and those made by business enterprises experiencing similar competition. Such practices are used in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors because they either better illuminate the environment in which the company is operating so as to inform decision-making or strategically position the company to remain viable and competitive in a complex market environment. As will be explored in Chapter Two of this study, business practices have been incorporated into school district leadership at times when environments were rapidly changing or when the public sought increased efficiency and accountability. Both of those conditions are present for contemporary schools, and the presence of strategic management practices might simply be a natural, updated version of past practice. Regardless, correlating strategic management practices to superintendents’ responses to interdistrict choice is important on three fronts. First, the open market principles on which contemporary choice practices have been based have changed the competitive dynamics of schooling, and it is worth studying to see whether strategic practices adopted by senior leadership have been similarly situated. Second, studying superintendent actions through the lens of strategic management provides us with a framework for assessing whether or not decisions relative to interdistrict competition were made

in isolation or as part of a broader, objective-driven strategy. In the event that such decisions are not part of a systematic approach, the introduction of a strategic management framework might be of value for school leaders looking to better integrate their mission, strategic objectives, and operations. Third, many universities and schools of education have taken to creating business-centric training programs for school leaders, and it is worth noting whether or not business practices are already being implemented in school corporations. In sum, this study utilizes a market-based framework to examine what actions superintendents take in the face of increased competition for students. Given that there is little reason to expect the competitive forces directed towards traditional public school corporations to subside, it makes good sense to know the extent to which practices specifically designed for such an environment are being used to respond to that pressure.

Lastly, when the preceding points are taken collectively, this study provides one more piece of well-thought literature on an oft-ignored topic. It was said earlier in this chapter that little literature exists on interdistrict open enrollment and even less on how district-level leaders respond to the practice. Though the phrase “contributing to the body of available literature” might seem somewhat trite (as one should hope all of their research is contributory) or self-aggrandizing for a junior scholar (verily, no future reviewer will ever use the term “ground breaking” to describe this work), the fact remains that this study looks where nobody else has looked and pauses to reflect where others have rushed on by. And whether a scholar one day decides to pursue a tangent from this work, say to correlate specific open enrollment practices to student outcomes or to measure the efficacy of traditional business principles in educational leadership, is presently inconsequential to the fact that their work will have a reference point thanks to this investigation.

Potential Limitations

Though every effort has been made to conceptualize a research project and line of inquiry that is well-structured, it must be acknowledged that certain potential shortcomings exist and must be addressed. Potential limitations for this study include the following:

1. Quantitative Nature of the Study: When a researcher selects a particular study design – be it quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods – they agree to be bound to a certain set of investigative limitations for the sake of having a discernable, means-tested framework through which their investigation can be conducted. Though some studies are better suited to certain methodological approaches, it is important to remember that the methods selected are not variations of better or worse but of what is most appropriate for the researcher's aims. As a quantitative study, this research will provide information on actions and correlations. It will not, however, provide an understanding of reasons or motives behind the findings. Such data are better parsed in a qualitative study. Those findings would certainly be useful, as they would aide in sense making that many find fruitful, but before someone can explore the “why” behind actions there must be an understanding of the “what.” That “what” will, for better or worse, be left to the interpretation of the reader and researcher rather than the subjects themselves.
2. Contextuality: Researchers hope that the work they put forth will be applicable or interesting to as many people as possible. The reality, though, is that manageable studies are often narrowly tailored to a specific question or context. That is the case here. This study is rooted in the specific forces at work regarding school choice and traditional public schools in Indiana. The findings will be specific to Indiana. This means that

attempts to apply lessons learned in a broad manner to other school choice contexts would be ill-advised.

3. Language: Attention will be given to developing a common understanding of specialized terms or concepts germane to this study. This includes the explicit provision of definitions derived from authoritative sources whenever possible. However, it is not possible to simply erase an individual's long-standing perception of a word or idea simply by setting defining parameters. For example, since the study attempts to correlate the prevalence of open enrollment to district type – urban, suburban, city, or rural – it will be critical for those terms to be defined. Yet for some the concepts of “suburban” and “city” might be interchangeable, or “rural” might call to mind very different images based on where readers grew up. While every effort will be made to clearly define terms for subjects, there is always the risk that their individual, organic understanding of the concept will be their default.
4. Instrument and Information: The use of a survey instrument poses unique challenges for any study. The ability to collect robust data is dependent upon response rates that, despite well-developed plans for distribution and completion follow-up, can sometimes fall short of desired outcomes. Once returned, the researcher must place a great deal of trust in the veracity of the responses, as the anonymous nature of the survey inhibits posing clarifying questions or checking truthfulness. This in turn opens up the door to the potential for response bias, wherein participants claim to do an action that is really absent from practice for the sake of appearing more favorable to the researcher. Similarly, some respondents might provide responses that appear topical but are actually unrelated to the practice of interdistrict open enrollment. All of these concerns arise from the use of

survey instrumentation, and each poses serious obstacles that must be addressed (or, at the very least, accounted for) in the research design.

5. Researcher Bias: Many studies have been done that illustrate the presence and impact of researcher bias on studies. From a logical standpoint, it makes sense that researchers would investigate topics that they find interesting or to which they have some sort of connection. Certainly people explore topics that they themselves might be wholly removed from, but lots of students and scholars turn to work to which they have some sort of meaningful connection. Indeed, “the personal is political” dictum from radical Feminism could easily become “the personal is researchable” for the work-ish among us. There’s nothing wrong with that so long as the researcher acknowledges that they bring to the table certain beliefs or orientations that impact their work and institutes proper mechanisms for checking the effect of that bias. Looking to this study, I acknowledge that my own background – within choice schools, within various public school settings, and as a public school leader – has bearing on this study. It is likely that the experiences and perceptions I bring to this work could shape the direction and interpretation of the study. And because such a possibility exists, it must be considered a limitation of the study.

Asserting these limitations at the outset is not an admission that the study presented here is fatally flawed. Rather, it provides an opportunity for intellectual honesty. It is a chance to step back, anticipate challenges, and then work to remedy them as best as possible for the sake of presenting a quality contribution towards the topic. Each consideration above has been addressed by myriad researchers before this study, and I have every confidence that they can be properly addressed in the course of this work.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Boote and Beile (2005) posit that “[d]octoral students must be scholars before they are researchers” (p. 11). Students must have a deep understanding of the skills and knowledge of their field as well as an ability to analyze and synthesize information, and few practices illustrate quality scholarship better than the creation of a dissertation literature review. They write, “A substantive, thorough, sophisticated literature review is a precondition for doing substantive, thorough, sophisticated research” (p. 3). Taking Boote and Beile’s admonition to heart, this dissertation consults and critically examines a sizable body of work as a foundation for exploring how Indiana superintendents have responded to interdistrict open enrollment.

The literature examined in this chapter falls into two streams, one addressing school choice and one addressing leadership and management. Concerning school choice, the chapter moves sequentially from establishing a broad understanding of school choice theory and mechanisms to a more refined focus on the study’s exploration of Indiana’s experience with interdistrict open enrollment as a form of school choice. It begins with “The Birth of Contemporary Choice,” which highlights the philosophical foundation on which choice practices were established and provides an introduction to the common justifications for creating choice systems. The next section, “Education Markets in Theory,” offers a deeper look at what is known about the strengths and weaknesses of the market-based practices that have been introduced into contemporary schooling. This is followed by “The Impact of Choice and Competition,” which establishes how market-based practices have impacted schools and communities in terms of academic performance, equity, and quality. Next, “Interdistrict Open Enrollment” breaks out the

choice practice that is the focus of this study, giving a sustained look at how the practice has been explored in various American states, including Indiana.

Turning to the literature of leadership and management, “The Role of Superintendents” helps us better understand the study’s participants by digging into the history, work, and challenges of school districts’ chief executive. Specific attention is given to both the business-centered preparation and open enrollment experiences of superintendents, which is the focus of this study. Afterwards, we delve into the concept of “Strategic Management as a Conceptual Framework,” drawing on literature that outlines the practice’s development as well as establishing the parameters by which the practice will be applied to an educational setting. Lastly, “The Study at Hand” will link the preceding learning to what is to be accomplished within this dissertation.

The Birth of Contemporary Choice

Public discourse on school choice often revolves around the reasons legislators or advocates offer to embrace the practice. Arum (1996) asserts that states with large private school sectors see improved educational outcomes. Ladner and Brouillette (2000) claim that choice programs pressure low-performing school corporations to improve. Viteritti (1999) promotes it as a means of providing equal opportunity to educational experiences regardless of socio-demographic factors, and others cite the promotion of equity as a reason to give choice a chance (Moloney, 1992; Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002). Olson Beal and Hendry (2012) identified parental empowerment as a primary factor influencing the presence of choice programs. Gottlob (2006) frames it within fiscal terms, saying that increased access to school choice increases graduation rates and decreases public costs associated with high school dropouts. Hess (2008) says that the type of school reform embraced matters less than the innovation and opportunities it

provides. These points are all well and good, but before we can fully appreciate what school choice is meant to do and how it has been employed, we must first start with a much more basic question: what are the origins of the school choice movement?

The presence of some form of educational choice in American schools has long been established (Beadie, 2008a; Beadie, 2008b; Minow, 2011; Ryan & Heise, 2002). However, Milton Friedman (2002) can be credited with establishing a contemporary application of market theory to K-12 education. In the 1950s, Friedman's essay on the inefficiency of government run schools claimed that the natural monopoly held by government-run educational entities provided too little incentive for needed educational reform. The most effective form of school control, he asserted, was a privatized system that operated in an open market. Schools would be held accountable to consumer desires, making adjustments in curriculum and efficiency according to market pressure. Strong, responsive schools would succeed, weaker, unresponsive schools would fold, and the whole system would be better for it. Friedman acknowledged that governments have a stake in a well-educated citizenry, as learned workers are critical to economic growth and innovation, so he did not recommend that they get out of the business entirely. Rather, he felt their best means of engagement to be two-fold. First, governments should provide funds to families to spend in the education markets. Families could then select an institution that met their child's needs. Second, governments should provide some form of regulatory oversight, an administrative quality control, so as to ensure that private institutions receiving public funds met minimum standards associated with quality schooling. The two points were mutually reliant. By providing funds for educational use, the government could ensure its right to assert administrative oversight; by exerting administrative oversight, the government could publicly

demonstrate accountability for how funds were used and continue to justify the expenditure so long as they continued to support the country's economic aims.

Nearly forty years later, John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990a) revisited Friedman's market theories as framed by the educational crisis rhetoric of the 1980s. They sought solutions for what they perceived to be America's chronic educational failings, items highlighted in the Reagan-era *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report. Public schools faced widespread criticism for low graduation rates and uninspiring student performance indicators that reformers claimed put the U.S.'s strategic world dominance in peril. The only way to avert catastrophe was through a systematic reconfiguration of the nation's public schools. Two major strands of education reform emerged from this period: the standards and accountability movement and school choice. Chubb and Moe were decidedly within the second camp.

The bifurcated response to school reform meant that a number of different solutions rose to prominence. These included approaches that worked within existing parameters and structures, like school-based management (Herman & Herman, 1992; Ogawa, 1994) and magnet schools (Doyle & Levine, 1984). But theorists like Chubb and Moe (1990b) advanced a very different solution. "The fundamental causes of poor academic performance," they wrote, "are not to be found in the schools, but rather in the institutions by which the schools have traditionally been governed" (Chubb & Moe, 1990b, p. 5). Public schools, as government run political entities, lacked the will and the ability to make meaningful change due to long-standing, entrenched interests. They existed on a foundation of democratic control that lacked appropriate incentives to promote change. In contrast, market control, wherein students and parents become consumers of an educational good and can effect change via mobility, would "free the schools from these disabling constraints by sweeping away the old institutions and replacing them with

new ones” (p. 8). The public need look no further than the academic outcomes that resulted in private schools to see the theory in action. To that end, Chubb and Moe called for the complete dismantling and reassembling of American schools. They wanted families to be provided government-funded school vouchers for use in privately-run schools. The government would provide support – tracking school-age children, distributing “scholarship” money, providing information on school options, and establishing minimum performance standards for schools – but teaching, learning, and administration would otherwise be a private endeavor.

Despite Chubb and Moe’s (1990b) admonitions that simply appending choice markets onto existing private and public school systems would fail to gain desired results, the wholesale transition to a market-based educational landscape never came to fruition. Policy networks and innovation diffusion led to a wide variety of education reforms and choice options throughout the United States (Mintrom & Vergari, 1998). These decisions were impacted by variables like teacher union strength, election year effects, and the presence of school choice practices in neighboring states. Yet the confluence of factors across the country never gave rise to the theoretical market envisioned by Friedman, Chubb, and Moe. Rather, adaptations arose in the form of charter schools, voucher schemes, and various iterations of open enrollment.

Education Markets in Theory

Jack Tweedie and Dennis Riley (1990) challenged Chubb and Moe’s school market proposal soon after it was released. The duo posited that the organizational and environmental advantages experienced by private schools as cited by their confreres were not guaranteed to hold up in an expanded market. No empirical evidence existed at that time to support the notion that market-based schools would continue to operate as they had under the current system following a whole-sale reconstituting of educational institutions; it was, in fact, logical to assume

that the changed system would result in unpredictable differences in institutional advantage. The challenge revolved around the theory and practice of markets as applied to K-12 educational institutions. Chubb and Moe's theory was conceptually tidier than reality was likely to be.

At its simplest form, a market exists when consumers have choices for products and services; the success of those products and services is directly linked to how well they meet the needs of the consumers. Strong or superior products are rewarded by greater consumption while weaker or inferior products are pushed from the market by a lack of consumer engagement. Natural markets exist at a reduced level in schools (Hanson, 1992). Families have some choice in whether they engage with public, private, or parochial schools. They can make decisions about what schools their children will attend by merit of where they choose to live, and they can exert pressure on schools as a means to influence the services or benefits that could be accrued by attending. However, the diversity of school communities reduces the impact of individual parental pressure and enables institutions to distance their practices from families' demands. By introducing competition into the market, schools must adopt one of three market orientations: providing a better product (outcomes), improving the means of production (efficiency), or better connecting with the customer (engagement). These orientations then dictate how a school serves students. This in turn forces schools to focus less on whole communities and more on market segments or target markets. In order to capture those targets, schools must provide goods or services that meet the needs of their consumer families.

Adnett and Davies (1999) built upon this basic market theory by pairing it with sociological understandings to better predict the full effects of school markets. Taking the promotion of socially optimal decision making as their goal, they concluded a school market could reach this point with the following: consumer access to information and the ability to act

on it; a means by which consumer preferences can be conveyed to and motivate change within schools; and the convergence of consumer preferences and welfare maximization or the inclusion of a regulatory regime to ensure the outcome. Such conditions are rarely present in consumer behavior. Instead, sociological realities and consumer behavior points to the potential for school choice markets to emerge as a means for the middle class to parlay social and cultural capital into differentiated outcomes that separate them from the poor. This, in turn, exacerbates existing class differences and inequalities (Adnett & Davies, p. 228). Market pressures also run the risk of emboldening school leaders to engage in opportunistic behavior that improve public perception of their institution but limit opportunities for the disadvantaged (Adnett & Davies, p. 230).

It is important to note that the goal of social welfare maximization is not shared by all who promote school markets. In fact, the variety of proposed goals and lack of consensus regarding the purpose of education has been considered a flaw in the market scheme (Bosetti, 2005). Some assert that emphasis should be given to whether any improvement in student achievement or outcomes exists, not whether the system as a whole is optimized (Levin & Belfield, 2003). Others put forth the inherent democratic value in providing greater options to all levels of society (Viteritti, 1996). Still others see school choice as providing an instrumentalist approach to education that promotes cost-effectiveness and improved achievement as the primary goals (Lubienski, 2005). Even Adnett and Davies (1999) are aware that some choice proponents are content with the notion that school market theories run on the premise that marginal returns create an improved system, that improving outcomes or opportunities for some results in an improved system for everyone. Yet they caution that the research does not support this. “Rather than the quasi-market producing a self-correcting mechanism,” they write, “it

creates a trap of declining demand from which the unsuccessful school has difficulty in escaping (Adler, 1993) whilst restricting market entry and exit” (Adnett & Davies, 1999, p. 230).

The fact that consensus cannot be reached about the goals of a market-based scheme should come as no surprise given that markets are designed to stratify the population. For all the talk of school choice’s ability to provide equitable opportunities and outcomes as a means of leveling the playing field and increasing democratic engagement (Viteritti, 1999; Minow, 2011), the nature of markets is to capitalize by means of division. Levin and Belfield (2003) found that markets force schools to be tailored towards and responsive to population niches. “[Schools] will compete,” they wrote, “by matching their appeal to particular educational preferences of parents rather than trying to produce a standardized educational product. The problem is that serving well a wide variety of different values and preferences is likely to undermine the social goal of providing a unifying educational influence around societal institutions and values” (Levin & Belfield, 2003, p. 194). They conclude that, though more must be done to determine the impact markets will have on education, the public’s inability to share a clearly defined educational goal will lead to ideologically driven policy decisions that ignore empirical results.

The lack of parity between the nature of markets and choice program structures has not gone unnoticed. McShane (2012), in a review of Indiana’s voucher programs, acknowledges that choice advocates have neglected market conditions in favor of erecting programs now and worrying about the details later. That cannot continue, he says, if choice programs are to be successful. They must meet the needs of their particular markets from the outset rather than attempting to backfill those needs once the programs are established.

Impact of Competition and Choice

So what can be said about the impact of market-based reforms on America's educational landscape? Though the purpose of this study is not oriented towards examining outcomes, attention must be given to the outcomes of market-based reforms that shape public dialogue. To that end, assessing the impact of choice reforms depends as much on the type of market-based practice as it does the individual study conducted. Nonetheless, the collective effects of market-based reforms are that findings have been mixed and dependent upon context and interpretation.

Academic Indicators

Individual studies have found that increased school choice has been found to provide positive improvements to educational outcomes like graduation rates and standardized test scores in some settings (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2015; Wolf, 2012). One of the most widely-cited studies on choice school performance came in 2013 from the Center for Research on Educational Outcomes at Stanford University and found that 25% of charter schools outperformed their traditional public school counterparts in student reading performance, whereas 29% outperformed their peer schools in math (Center for Research on Educational Outcomes, 2013). The study further held that charter programs were making consistent gains on traditional schools, particularly in service to minority students. Yet collective reviews are less decisive. Belfield and Levin's (2002) review of nearly 30 studies on competition's effects on educational outcomes found one-third to two-thirds of the evaluations showed increased competition had a statistically significant impact on quality indicators as varied as graduation rates, school expenditures, and teacher quality. Yet they cautioned that gains were modest in the practical sense, some studies might have used the same indicators to illustrate increased quality in multiple areas, and the expenses associated with increased competition, both in terms of

educational unit cost and social cohesion, were unknown. More recently, Zimmer, Guarino, and Buddin (2010) conducted a review of school choice options' impact on educational outcomes and found mixed results. Gains were modest when present, but the majority of reports found choice schools performed no better or worse than traditional public schools. Taken collectively, the impact that choice and competition have on educational outcomes could be summarized as having some effect in some contexts at some times.

Equity

Choice is rarely able to provide equal opportunity or outcomes to all who seek it. Instead, it becomes executed in a complex balancing of factors that cater to some and leave others behind. As one study summarized, “[e]valuation of competition thus depends on who takes advantage of choice, multiplied by the payoff to those who are able to choose, net of the costs of making that additional choice” (Belfield & Levin, 2002, p. 297). It’s also worth remembering that enrollment competition is confined to those who share a market position; not all schools need to compete for students and those who do need not (or choose not to) always compete for the same population (Yair, 1996). A review of Indiana charter school participation found the schools educated a largely minority, low-income population that exhibited no difference in academic performance when compared with traditional public school students (Akey, Plucker, et. al, 2008). A study of market-oriented Washington, D.C. charters found the schools focused on elite clientele and were less likely to serve high needs populations (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, & Henig, 2002). Reviews of other choice programs have found that minority students are more likely to apply but less likely to accept available seats (Campbell, West, & Peterson, 2005), and that students who left choice schools tended to be lower-performing and African American (Cowen, Fleming, Witte, & Wolf, 2012).

Ample literature suggests choice programs might lead to increased self-sorting and segregation. Religious affiliation played a key factor in choice placements for some (Smith & Meier, 1995; Cambell, West, & Peterson, 2005; Austin, 2015). Others noted that socio-economic factors had a primary influence (Ball, 1993). A study of school choice patterns in three urban markets found that schools became organized into a competitive hierarchy and that “competitive incentives appear to have encouraged schools to sort themselves based largely on their preferred clientele, with different groups of schools asserting their advantageous position to serve more affluent students” (Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009, p. 641). The authors were careful to point out, though, that much of this positioning is context-based and dependent upon the type of strategy a school thinks will make them most effective at engaging with their given market. Lastly, a recent study by Adamson (2016) at the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education compared countries that invested in state-run schools with countries that relied upon a market-based approach. The data revealed that students of all backgrounds were most often better served by a public investment approach; market-based programs invariably resulted in an inequitable environment that failed to adequately meet some students’ learning needs.

Indicators of Quality

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) conducted a review of choice programs in six different countries and found that competitive responses tended to be “skewed towards environmental rather than academic factors” (Hirsch, 1995, p. 251). A study of Canadian choice options put forth that choice school principals “reported that parents are uninterested in quantitative measures of any kind and are instead attuned to a more intuitive set of criteria to judge schools” (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 535). Engagement with choice in their circumstance was “akin to choosing a family doctor or pastor” in the sense that it is

relational and highly individualized (Davies & Quirke, p. 544). Another study found that families based their decisions on things like proximity to home or class size (Daring, 2005). It is significant some of the reasons given for increasing choice options, namely improved academic outcomes and opportunities, are often not motivating factors in selecting a school.

Competition's Caveat

Chubb and Moe (1990) would likely argue that the outcomes highlighted are what we should expect from a system that half-heartedly embraced their panacea. Market-based forces did not fail as much as they were not properly implemented. Their argument is premised on a systemic upheaval of educational institutions, one wherein schools as publicly financed bureaucratic structures are eliminated in favor of privately run, market-responsive institutions. School choice cannot simply be an *add-on* educational option; it must be the *sole* educational option. To that end, Chubb and Moe are right on one account. If government-run schools were shuttered, choice schools would thrive if for no other reason than their single greatest form of competition, traditional public schools, would not exist. This would say nothing of the 80% of American families that use and find value in public schools that would suddenly be without their right to exercise choosing a publicly funded, publicly run school.

This brings us to an important point. The conditions under which Friedman's theories or Chubb and Moe's choice plan could come to full fruition are unlikely to ever exist at a large scale. While choice programs have been found to be incredibly popular when polled (Foundation for Educational Choice, 2010), data illustrate that a majority of U.S. families place value in traditional public school models (PDK/Gallup, 2014). They consistently rate their own schools well despite concerns about standardized testing, school finance, and the quality of the nation's schools as a whole. And this abiding belief in public educational institutions provides an

interesting backdrop to consider the focus of this study. Though not a pure market option, interdistrict open enrollment joins individual autonomy, a valued institutional structure, and competitive forces into a choice framework that promises transformative potential.

Interdistrict Open Enrollment

Up to this point, we have examined the concept of market-based reforms broadly, looking at the nature of education markets and what research has shown in relation to how their practice has functioned in application. Most of the available research on school markets is situated within the practice of charter schools and voucher programs. However, this study focuses on another form of choice practice – interdistrict open enrollment – that shares a common theoretical foundation with other choice practices but is distinct in its application. Interdistrict open enrollment can be defined as an educational policy that permits students from one public school corporation to attend a school in another public school corporation. Though available in most states, the practice can be found in countless variations that differ on topics as varied as whether or not the practice is voluntary and whether receiving school corporations can set admissions criteria for out-of-district transfers (Reback, 2007). The popularity of the policy, however, resides in its ability to provide choice options in a thoroughly public manner. Jimerson (2002) put it best by writing that “interdistrict open enrollment as a policy is able to offer expanded opportunities for choice without crossing certain political minefields, such as separation of church and state, sending money to private enterprises, supporting special interest groups, or costing significant additional money. Students merely move from one public school to another” (p. 88).

Despite the practice’s prevalence, interdistrict open enrollment has only been studied in depth in a handful of states. In many ways, the findings from these studies mirror what has been

found in examinations of other market-based approaches. What follows is an explication of the findings from the most reviewed states.

Minnesota

Minnesota developed one of the nation's first open enrollment programs in the 1980s as a means of providing students with access to more school choice, and the longevity of the program has resulted in one of the most complete state-level examinations of the practice. The earliest reviews found that the practice had limited impact on student mobility, student outcomes, or school district operations (Goldhaber, 1999; Witte & Rigdon, 1993). It was hypothesized that the threat of losing students and funds to neighboring districts increased pressure on Minnesota districts to improve and it was claimed that districts implemented programs to attract and retain students, but no mention was given to what those programs looked like or how they operated (Goldhaber, 1999). However, more recent reviews have provided better detail. Open enrollment resulted in an under-representation of minority student participation and the reallocation of between \$1.9 and \$4.8 million in funding. Corporations that lost students cut student activities and services, like foreign language classes or guidance counselors, while corporations that gained students increased curricular offerings and field trips (Jimerson, 2002). This raises the specter that the gain felt by some corporations results in a direct loss for others, which ultimately impacts the students who remain in the losing corporations.

Carlson, Lavery, and Witte (2011) conducted another in-depth review of Minnesota's open enrollment program in conjunction with a study of a similar program in Colorado. In contrast to many other studies of the factors impacting school selection, the researchers found academic indicators and a corporation's structural components directly linked to choice decisions. Demographic factors, like the socioeconomic or racial composition of the receiving

school, were of lesser consequence. When the team looked at participant demographics, they found that “many students are exiting relatively high-achieving districts only to enroll into even higher achieving districts,” which led them to conclude that “open enrollment may be operating predominantly as a public school voucher program for middle-class and upper-middle class families” (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011, p. 89). So though the findings did not point to socioeconomic segregation as being a stated preference in selecting a school, it became a de facto preference by merit of who was doing the moving. Furthermore, the research revealed that low-achieving districts gained fewer students than they lost, exacerbating issues of quality and available services in those locations.

Massachusetts

Interdistrict open enrollment studies conducted out of Massachusetts examined the characteristics of school districts and the reasons why families opted to participate in the program. Similar to findings from Minnesota, academic quality was identified as a primary influencer of choice decisions (Daring, 2005; Fossey, 1994). It is unclear, though, whether quality was used as a proxy for demographics. Massachusetts school districts that received students had higher median incomes, greater educational attainment levels, increased per-pupil spending, higher test scores, and lower discipline rates than the districts from which the students came (Fossey, 1994). These signs point to another example of how a market-based program resulted in the abandoning of struggling communities in favor of opportunities among the more privileged. There were also indicators that the program’s use could not promote systemic change. As Fossey (1994) noted, “[F]or a school choice program to improve the overall quality of public education, it must do more than place a few children in schools of relatively high socio-economic status; it must also improve schools in poorer communities” (p. 331).

Michigan

Michigan's open enrollment studies paint a grim picture. Early research found negative results from the practice as a whole. Despite the fact that people from low-quality schools saw choice as a means to access better schools, increased choice options in Detroit led to increased social stratification, experienced resistance from suburban communities fearful of receiving transfer students that were demographically different than their home population, and saw that the loss of students from predominantly poor districts hurt those corporations (Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994). Later work found things little better. Arsen, Plank, and Sykes (2001) identified five dimensions of the local context that impacted strategic responses of school corporations to choice initiatives: socioeconomic status, socioeconomic diversity, school district enrollment size, population density, and population growth. What did these dimensions look like in practice? "Student mobility under interdistrict choice reflects a pattern of upward filtering," they wrote. "Students are generally moving to districts with better educational outcomes and higher socioeconomic status than their home districts" (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 2001, p. 19). Ten years later, another study again found that the socioeconomic make-up of a school significantly influenced decisions (Ni & Arsen, 2011). What could have led to such a negative set of factors influencing open enrollment? Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) opined that "[e]ven if available to everyone, experience has shown that only a few families would choose to send their children to schools... outside their residential areas. Access and action are not the same thing" (p. 449).

Indiana

Indiana has permitted open enrollment in some form since 1995, and Indiana Code 20-26-11 establishes the availability of the practice and the parameters by which schools can engage in it (Hermann, Burroughs, & Plucker, 2009). Occasional modifications to the state law have

been made, such as when lawmakers expanded the practice from Indianapolis to the rest of the state or sought to inhibit school corporations from accepting only the most qualified transfer students, but it is unclear what information was used to impact those changes. In the 20 years that the practice has been available, no studies have been conducted on how the policy has been implemented in the state. Nobody has analyzed how the practice is being conducted or whether school corporations are changing how they operate to attract and retain students. Nobody has examined the demographics of transfer students or the corporations involved. Nobody has explored academic outcomes or performance indicators. It wasn't until 2017 that the state even sought to publicly report how many students were transferring among public school corporations. And though findings appear largely consistent across different manifestations of similarly situated open enrollment programs and even different types of choice, the fact that a public policy practice has gone unexamined is troubling. This study will begin to bring an end to this glaring lack of information.

The Role of Superintendents

The role of the local public school superintendent emerged between the 1830s and 1850s as the need for an executive leadership position distinct from that of principal or teacher became necessary due to school districts' growth, changes and expansions to curriculum, and heightened demands for accountability and efficiency (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Over nearly 200 years, it should be of little surprise that the superintendents of yesteryear look quite different than their modern-day counterparts. Wolf (1988) found that "[t]he role of the superintendent shifts, is re-imagined, over time and requires intentional development to keep skills relevant" (p. 28). That is, social expectations and the needs of learning communities develop as society changes, which makes the evolution of school superintendents' functions understandable. Some scholars believe

that superintendent practices can be segmented into five accepted historical roles: the teacher-scholar (1850-1900s); the organizational manager (1900s-1930s); the democratic leader (1930-mid 1950s); the applied social scientist (mid-1950s-mid-1970s); and the communicator (mid-1970s-today)(Kowalski, 2005). They assert that, though it is possible to find traces of each of these historical roles in contemporary practice, one dominant archetype emerges to fit the needs of the day. Others, however, have simplified the role's historicity by claiming that superintendents function as politician, manager, and teacher (Cuban, 1985).

Regardless of how historians parse the evolution of the superintendency, it is clear that the role of the superintendent to ensure the creation of quality schools has long been a concern. Reavis (1947), writing shortly after World War II, said that, "Discriminating citizens with children to be educated will not long reside in a community which tolerates, or is satisfied with, poor schools. Conversely, superior schools have tremendous drawing-power for persons seeking desirable communities in which to make their homes" (p. 436). He goes on to claim that good schools are a byproduct of a superintendents' ability to emerge as a leader engaged with community problems, an expert on local demographics, a coordinator of youth-related resources, and as an advocate linking long-term community planning to school health (p. 441). From Reavis' perspective, the superintendent was not just responsible for ensuring kids learned an operational level of academic skills to function as adults but for creating an ecosystem that promoted the long-term viability of communities built from a well-educated citizenry. A casual reader could be excused for confusing Reavis' post-war musings with a similar set of challenges facing school executives today. Truly, items identified as concerns for contemporary superintendents – fiscal support and resource availability, social and demographic shifts, school reform initiatives, and stakeholder relationships – appeared just as pressing seven decades ago

(Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). What has changed, however, is the way in which school reform measures have impacted the social contract between educational institutions and the communities they serve.

Houston and Bryant (1997) believe that “[t]he most important thing that superintendents and school boards can do is to engage the community around what they want for their schools. Clarify what it is that people expect” (p. 759). However, finding such clarity can be difficult. Joseph McDonald (2014) asserts that reform movements shaping contemporary education have resulted in substantial disruption in how schools are viewed. This leaves district leaders to balance a public narrative that acknowledges entrenched cultures or interests on one hand and a compelling vision for growth on the other. The success of any endeavor framed by this convergence, be it externally or internally imposed, is dependent upon the ability of the superintendent to act as a catalyst for change (Ireh & Bailey, 1999). In their daily practice, superintendents have expressed that their attention has been directed towards four major concerns – governance complexities, funding for teachers and facilities, accountability, and privatization and choice issues – leaving them a very real need to efficiently address difficult circumstances on multiple fronts (Hoyle, 1999). Many respond to these concerns in a manner that is similar to approaches in the corporate world. They emphasize the alignment of mission, vision, and execution through a strategic planning process. Basham and Lunenburg (1989) explored school districts’ use of strategic planning and found little to no correlation to student achievement but some positive relationship to local property values. Valentine (1988) found strategic planning useful for district-level leaders but notes that effectively doing so is dependent upon factors like external pressure, clarity of goals, and a systematic approach to planning and evaluation. A key component to any planning process is the availability of thorough, accurate

information. The better information obtained, the more likely a plan will succeed. However, Lasher (1990) found superintendents tended to make judgments based on partial knowledge, relying on cues from their community or budgets, and favored small adjustments rather than major practice or policy changes. Wills and Peterson (1992) seconded this point by finding that superintendents' "strategic responses were often a corollary of varying patterns of information retrieval" and used as a means of reducing "perceived uncertainty or equivocality in the environment" (p. 248).

Interestingly, many education reform advocates have taken to advancing the belief that the myriad challenges faced by modern schools, especially those driven by increased competition and resource diminishment brought on by expansion of school choice policies, could be better addressed by allowing business executives to occupy the superintendent's office. In fact, states have faced pressure to deregulate superintendent licensing requirements so as to make it easier for business and military leaders to become superintendents (Kowalski & Bjork, 2005). Setting aside the obvious fact that schools have very distinct needs and objectives from those of businesses and the military, such proposals neglect the fact that school leaders have consistently been trained in scientific management techniques for over a hundred years. By the late 19th century, concerns existed that superintendents lacked managerial knowledge and skill fueled by the belief that schools did not operate efficiently compared to businesses. As a result, many large universities began to develop superintendent training programs that were business-centered (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Parker (1996) says that "[t]he benefit of borrowing strategies from the business world evolved as superintendents fought for recognition as good managers who are regarded as valuable by most school board members, businessmen in the community, and taxpayers" (p. 64). Generally belief about the impetus for the movement by superintendents

towards business-centered training and preparation can be divided into two camps: those, like Callahan (1962), who believed the shift was a response to superintendents' insecurity when comparing their work and status to those of leaders in the for-profit sector, and others, like Cuban (1984), who saw the movement as a natural evolution as schools began to reflect the nature and complexity of a corporate enterprise. Regardless of why the movement towards business-centered training took place, there is little doubt that present-day superintendents are versed in at least a basic understanding of management theory. University training programs include coursework in organizational design, human resource management, leadership theory, microeconomics, and finance. Some universities have even gone so far as to create programs that emphasize an even greater connection between leading educational institutions and business practices, as is evidenced by Rice University's Education Entrepreneurship Program and Indiana University's dual-degree programs between their School of Education and the Kelley School of Business.

Given the preceding points, from the historical development of the school superintendency to the way in which a superintendent might rely on business management techniques to lead their organizations, what might all of this mean for how superintendents respond to a competition-driven practice like open enrollment? It is really not clear. Research is limited on the link between superintendents and the practice. One early study found that Washington state superintendents tended to be against open enrollment, though leaders of districts with high levels of high school drop-outs were more likely to favor the practice (Currey, 1992). Another found that California superintendents who opted to have their districts participate in the state's open enrollment program cited the chance for small districts to increase revenue and the perception that a sense of healthy competition would lead all schools to improve as

reasons for participating (Duim, 2013). Still another found that Ohio superintendents reported feeling compelled to respond to market forces due to the prevalence of school choice options, though no indication was given as to what shape those responses took (May, 2007). And yet another found that New Jersey superintendents held positive views of their state's interdistrict choice program as it related to being able to provide an equitable education for students, with no perceptual difference existing based on the corporation's socioeconomic make-up, geographic location, or enrollment size (Zywicki, 2015).

As identified in the preceding passages, it is possible to find examinations of how superintendents use strategic planning in their practice and some literature on superintendents and open enrollment policies, but none of the studies to date indicate what that strategic process might look like in response to interdistrict open enrollment. They focus on motivators and perceptions, not responses and practices. This is a critical gap in the literature. If researchers and policy makers want to properly evaluate how open enrollment impacts students and communities, they must first know what (if anything) superintendents are doing to implement it, whether those actions are consistent across contexts, and what type of approach was used to justify the actions taken. This is particularly true in a state like Indiana, where the proliferation of choice structures is rapid yet the impact of those practices remains largely unknown. It is precisely in this practicality gap – in not knowing the operational shape of a long-standing choice policy – that this study seeks to stand.

Strategic Management as a Framework

Market-based reforms originate with the belief that competition-centered practices can create better schools, and the expansion of school choice programs has resulted in business practices exerting increased influence on how America's schools function. The connection

between K-12 education and business practice runs the gamut from those who suggest simply greater connectivity between the two sectors (Doyle & Levine, 1986) and those who would seek education-as-business (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Many education leaders are already familiar with some of the basic underpinnings of business practice thanks to their own grounding in organizational theory, human capital management, and operational finances. This, in turn, makes it logical to connect primary and secondary education to a practice like strategic management.

Strategic management “provides organizations with a framework for developing abilities and coping with changing environments” (Montanari & Bracker, 1986, p. 252). At its core, the practice of strategic management means that “decisions and actions at all levels are driven by a few fundamental strategies or policies that are strongly endorsed as being critical for improving an agency’s performance over the long run” (Poister & Streib, 1999, p. 310). The field emerged as early as the 1940s when post-war society began seeing accelerated rates of change in firms and the application of science and technology to management practices (Ansof, 1965; Bracker, 1980). Horwitch (1987), writing in the late 1980s, saw a shift from general management practices and strategic planning meant to extend or create value towards a post-modern emphasis on internal and external technologies meant to create and transform value for the consumer. Indeed, one of the primary drivers of strategic management development is this notion, first credited to Michael Porter, of achieving an advantage in the face of value-based competition (Ghemawat, 2002). The more companies focus on increasing value for consumers, as opposed to simply shifting costs or capturing a greater market share, the more likely they are to find a sustainable, long-term advantage.

Tangents aside, the emphasis and practice of strategic management has shifted since its inception. Melé and Guillén (2006) outlined the framework’s development in tandem with major

concepts or tools over the last sixty years. According to the pair, the 1960s were dominated by attempts to define strategy, the development of corporate strategic direction, and an emphasis on planning and growth. It was around this time that strategic management consultants, like the Boston Consulting Group, came into favor and so, too, did the use of generic strategies or templates meant to strengthen competitive advantage via analytics (Ghemawat, 2002). Tools, like the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and growth share matrix, began to take form as a means of operationalizing strategic practice. This continued into the 1970s, wherein attention was given to strategic management's content and processes through the evaluation and implementation of a value chain. Generic strategic practices continued to be used into the industrial organization economics era of the 1980s, but what emerged was a desire to strike competitive advantage as a result of the pursuit of choice. Such choices were often derived from conducting a Porter's five forces analysis of pressures directed towards a business from five distinct arenas – industry competition, potential entrants, suppliers, strategic substitutes, and buyers – before developing a strategy that responded to whichever of the forces was most likely to result in strategic advantage. The 1990s found attention directed towards resource and capabilities development with an examination of entities' core competencies and value systems, whereas the 2000s found value in corporate learning, knowledge, and innovation made possible through improvements in integrated information technologies.

A sub-strain of strategic management present since the 1970s concerns the attention corporations give to how their business practices impact their stakeholders and community at large (Ackerman, 1973; Gilbert, 1992; Mintzberg, 1983). The concept, known as corporate social responsibility, recognizes that “businesses must not only respond to but must also anticipate public concerns” as a means to be successful (Melé & Guillén, 2006, p. 7). Doing so can range

from focusing on how individuals respond to the way in which a company's goods and services are produced, marketed, and sustained (i.e. fair labor practices, environmentally friendly processes, etc.) to how a company engages with broader social issues (i.e. whether they show support for a higher minimum wage, support charitable enterprises, or respond to socially divisive legislation). Contemporary practitioners have taken to framing corporate social responsibility in terms of "conscious capitalism," or a means through which meaning-making and money-making are not mutually exclusive domains (Lipscomb, 2014; Mackey, 2007). Whether viewed through a traditional or modern lens, leading strategy consultants have recognized that the need to align internal practices and external engagement is critical to long-term viability. A report from McKinsey and Company offered, "The success of a business depends on its relationships with the external world... Decisions made at all levels of the business, from the boardroom to the shop floor, affect that relationship. For the business to be successful, decision making in every division and at every level must take account of those effects" (Brown & Nuttal, 2013, p. 4). Put more succinctly, viable corporate strategy must look at internal actions in conjunction with how those actions impact the broader world in which the entity operates.

Contemporary business education, be it in university settings or found on the pages of publications like the *Strategic Management Journal* and *Harvard Business Review*, continues to draw upon elements from each of the eras previously mentioned. Practitioners still undertake SWOT or five forces analysis. They still examine value chains and core competencies and information systems. They explore how organizations actions impact internal and external relations. In the face of disparate approaches, it's prudent to ask, what elements of strategic

management practice cut across decades and tools to define the field? Or, put another way, if strategic management is a framework, from what is the frame built?

Experts assert that an organization's strategic practice is built on three phases: formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Montanari & Bracker, 1986; Poister & Streib, 1999). However, it might be more useful to break these three phases into five distinct actions: articulation, analysis, alignment, implementation, and evaluation. At the outset, the organization defines and articulates its mission, values, and vision. It sets for itself an objective to be met. It establishes an understanding of the context in which it operates via some form of analysis, and it begins to weigh options for how to proceed. Critical at this junction is the organization's ability to determine the fit between what it believes about itself, what the industry appears to value or is open to supporting, and the strategic choices to be made. Resources are then allocated in support of the objective as the organization moves forward with specific strategic choices. Alignment of managerial processes and responsibilities enables the objective to be pursued and achieved. This alignment draws together a number of factors within an organization – initiatives, resources, management, environment, and structure – and pairs them with adjacent fields (i.e. economics, marketing, and sociology) to create a cohesive direction towards which efforts can be channeled (Nag, Hambrick, & Chen, 2007). Clear communication of the organization's vision is used to create a multi-level strategic agenda that orients the entire organization towards the objective. As the process unfolds, feedback from various stakeholders and the use of different metrics lead to an evaluation of progress towards obtaining the objective. Adjustments are made as needed. Given that rapid change is a hallmark of many business environments, the framework of analysis, alignment, implementation, and evaluation becomes a perpetual cycle. It is only within extreme circumstances, such as the introduction of new leadership or a market collapse or the

emergence of a disruptive technology, that a re-articulation need take place. Taking the preceding points collectively, it can be deduced that the successful development and implementation of a strategic practice is highly dependent upon leadership (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Collis & Rukstad, 2008).

Many public-sector reforms, including those associated with education, have turned to strategic management as a means of providing direction and resources (Agasisti, 2015). The application of strategic management principles to public sector or not-for-profit enterprises initially took shape in the 1980s. Ring and Perry (1985) hypothesized that the practice could be useful but that public sector actions would be found lacking in the face of strategic management principles grounded in the private sector because of issues associated with policy ambiguity, open decision-making, the influence of competing interest groups, artificial time constraints, and shaky coalitions. These conditions often resulted in “attention to emergent rather than intended strategies” (p. 283). Hatten (1982) said applying the framework could also be inhibited by managers who had expertise in discrete areas but lacked familiarity with strategy development as well as the difficulty that not-for-profit organizations had in articulating compelling goals to guide strategic actions. While private enterprises could use profit as a primary driver, public sector objectives were often nebulous and less clearly defined.

How was the public enterprise to move forward with the application of strategic management? Many not-for-profit organizations could identify existing functional strategies (in areas like finances, production, or marketing) and use those actions to define strategy (Hatten 1982). Once those functional practices were identified, the organization could then begin to develop or state specific goals that were consistent with their environment, resources, and existing plans before moving forward (Hatten, p. 92). This approach became more complicated,

though, with the development of “quasi markets” in public sector enterprises in the early 1990s, wherein state-linked entities were expected to compete for resources in a manner that mirrored private sector competition (Ferlie, 1992). This required additional attention to be given to “questions of efficiency, incentives, and of market structure” (Ferlie, p. 82). Organizations seeking to remain relevant and valued often turned to intentional efforts to attract additional business, reduce costs while raising quality, and market their value or relevance to desired constituencies (Ferlie, 1992; Hatten, 1982).

Public sector quasi markets continued to expand in the 2000s, with some researchers indicating that their continued market-oriented growth could signal a dramatic shift in what public enterprises value and do (Poister, 2010). For example, Theodore Poister (2010) noted the following:

“[P]ublic managers have seen continued growth in outsourcing to private sector contractors and suppliers, the rise of collaboratives to make policy as well as deliver public services, the phenomenal growth of e-government service channels, a more insistent customer focus on the part of government agencies, and increased pressure for accountability and performance from elected officials, the media, and the public” (p. S253).

How could these various pressures be confronted? Poister said that the development of a multi-front strategic management practice could mitigate the impact of these forces and help public organizations stay relevant and competitive (p. S249). Yet despite nearly four decades of research on the use of strategic management in public sector enterprises and an increased application of such practices in some areas, many public entities still fall sort of implementing strategy to maximize effective performance (Poister, p. S253).

Studies have been done on how strategic management impacts public-sector performance, and empirical evidence points to positive relationships when the practice is done well (Boyne & Walker, 2010). It is theorized that strategic management can pay dividends in education given the fact that strategic planning processes can help schools anticipate shortcomings or market changes and respond appropriately (Fidler, 1998). Indeed, many school corporations already undertake some form of mission and vision defining or long-term planning; couching those practices within the framework of strategic management simply provides greater definition and access to useful tools that might have otherwise been missed. That said, it is important to acknowledge that strategic planning and strategic management are not one in the same. Strategic planning provides a broad understanding of the context in which an organization operates and the direction it hopes to move whereas strategic management is “a more encompassing process that is concerned with managing an organization in a strategic manner on a continuing basis” (Poister & Streib, 1999, p. 310). These points notwithstanding, no literature has been identified that explores the application of strategic management practices to schools or school corporations facing increased market pressure. Even as universities expand upon the training provided to school administrators, pairing traditional education course work with management theory and strategy courses, the extent to which those practices are used in the field is unclear. Given the potential that strategic management has to positively influence educational change, this study seeks to use the field as a conceptual framework as it explores superintendent actions related to interdistrict open enrollment.

The Study At Hand

Public discussion of school choice is often singular in definition and binary in assessment. Various iterations are lumped together and pronounced to be good or bad. In some

ways, the propensity to treat various practices monolithically is understandable. The studies of different choice iterations discussed in this chapter, be they charters or vouchers or open enrollment, bear striking similarities in terms of theoretical foundations, lived practice, and findings. Pronouncing a wholesale judgment on choice as being positive or negative avoids the slippery slope of having to determine that some choices are better than others. Nonetheless, nuance is necessary because the decisions made about how children are educated have reverberating effects for the child, their community, and our collective institutional structures.

The fact that Indiana's practice of open enrollment has gone unassessed is troublesome. At best it reflects a mere lack of interest in the topic in the face of so many other practices to explore. At worst it reflects a deliberate indifference to understanding how educational policy is practiced. Either way, important questions have gone unanswered in the twenty years since the practice was first implemented. Have traditional public schools felt any competitive pressure as a result of students' ability to attend a public school of their choice? If so, what has that pressure yielded? Have school corporations performed like voucher or charter schools in directing resources and programming towards niche markets? Have they increased attention to communication, academics, or activities offerings? Have they done nothing at all? Has the creation of a market-based environment resulted in the appropriation of strategic management practices that have been proven to increase institutional effectiveness in the face of change in other settings, or have they continued to use old practices and processes in the new environment? Following so many years of change for Indiana's schools, so very little is known about the most basic means by which school corporations have responded to their evolving environment. And the greater questions, those of impacts on individuals and communities, cannot be adequately addressed until a foundational understanding of open enrollment practice is first achieved.

The preceding literature review provided a systematic contextualization in which a study of Indiana superintendents' responses to interdistrict open enrollment can be conducted. Given what is known about educational markets and how market theory has played out in other contexts, it is possible to catalogue superintendent actions and assess the degree to which they conform with commonly accepted strategic practice. Doing so answers questions others have not asked, provides a better understanding of lived market practices to leaders and families, and establishes a foundation for future research to be conducted.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hostetler (2005) asserts that “good education research is a matter not only of sound procedures but also of beneficial aims and results; our ultimate aim as researcher and educators is to serve people’s well-being” (p. 16). In line with Hostetler’s beliefs, this study sought to create a quality research product that more clearly defined how Indiana superintendents practice interdistrict open enrollment. Doing so resulted in findings that better equip various stakeholders – district leaders, legislators, and even students and families – to understand how this particular form of school choice is experienced at the ground level and make better informed decisions. The ability of this research to achieve such aims was correlated to the soundness of the study’s methodological approach. Such soundness is the focus of this chapter.

In the pages that follow, I outline the study’s methodology for exploring superintendents’ interdistrict open enrollment response. A review of the research questions articulated in Chapter One will lead to a discussion of quantitative research methods, researcher positionality, and the concepts of reliability and validity. This is followed by a discussion of the study’s setting and participants. Once this is done, the study’s instrumentation, data collection, and analysis procedures are reviewed. Finally, the chapter closes with a reflection on the limitations of the study’s methodology.

Research Questions and Definitions

A review of relevant literature as well as the context of school choice in the Hoosier state revealed a surprising fact: despite several years of implementation, no study had been undertaken to examine what interdistrict open enrollment looks like at the school corporation level. Seeking to fill this research void, this study proposed to answer the following questions:

1. What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?
2. Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation they lead?
3. Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?

The first question was one of definition; it sought to establish practices and their frequencies as responses to interdistrict open enrollment. The second question was one of correlation; it sought to determine whether or not the practice of open enrollment differs based on the school corporation's context. The third question was one of practice; it sought to determine whether or not a commonly employed strategic framework linked to the market theories that undergird school choice is making its way into the open enrollment practices of district-level leaders and whether or not there might be an opening to provide greater, more strategic alignment of districts' managerial processes in light of increased competition.

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used:

1. School Choice: the practice of providing educational options to children and families.
2. Interdistrict Choice: the practice of permitting children and families to choose schooling options in a school district or corporation other than that in which they reside.
3. Open Enrollment: the practice of permitting students to enroll in a school or corporation other than that in which they would be assigned due to residence.
4. City: A "[t]erritory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City" (NCES, 2015, p. 1).
5. Suburban: A "[t]erritory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area" (NCES, p. 1).

6. Town: A “[t]erritory inside an Urban Cluster” (NCES, p. 1)
7. Rural: A “census-defined rural territory” not covered in the previous three definitions (NCES, p. 1).
8. Strategic Management: a framework for developing an entities abilities for the purposes of anticipating and coping with change consisting of stages related to articulation, analysis, alignment, implementation, and evaluation

Research Method

Unpacking the research method for this study on interdistrict open enrollment involves the following: providing a rational for the use of a quantitative design, discussing the appropriateness of conducting survey research, examining the types of data to be collected, exploring the researcher’s positionality in relation to the topic, and addressing the concepts of reliability and validity.

Rationale for a Quantitative Design

Michael Crotty (1998) begins *The Foundations of Social Research* with an examination that links epistemological orientation with research methods. It is a careful, linear discussion that reminds researchers that what they believe about the nature of knowledge should be directly correlated to how their research is conducted. What is unique about this relationship is where the epistemological understanding is rooted. At first blush it might appear that the researcher possess a deep, internalized epistemological orientation, as if they were born with “Objectivist,” “Constructionist,” or “Subjectivist” stamped on their soul at creation. But how the nature of knowledge is understood has surprisingly less to do with the person conducting the study than it does the problem being explored. It is the research question and the responses it elicits, not the researcher, that dictates and directs the study’s philosophical underpinnings.

This study was premised on accepting two statements. First, the State of Indiana has a practice of permitting school corporations to conduct interdistrict open enrollment as a means of school choice. Second, traditional public school districts are to varying degrees engaging in the practice of interdistrict open enrollment. Any number of questions could be derived from these two facts and, indeed, a handful of researchers have taken similarly situated facts from other contexts and explored them in different ways. They have sought to understand how various constituencies *perceive* open enrollment programs or to assess the *effects* of such practices after the practice has been implemented. This study was one of effects, of responses, at the practice's point of origin. Questions of effects often tend to be empirically grounded and taken as factually true, and might lead toward an objectivist epistemology. However, the science behind this study, the data that will be derived and analyzed, comes not from a static entity or experiment but from people. When people answer questions, they do so through the lens of their own experience. They interpret words, parse past encounters, and deposit responses that are colored by history or belief. They bring a subjective force to bear on their engagement.

The research questions presented in this study bridged the concepts of origin and impact by exploring what interdistrict open enrollment looked like in a given context. Even as a study dependent upon the subjective responses of people (which, as discussed later, can be somewhat mitigated by attention to instrument reliability and validity), the study required a methodological approach that could derive concrete, enumerable data points to delineate what the practice is in reality. Doing so was best accomplished through the completion of a quantitative study.

Burke and Onwuegbuzie (2004) note that some of the primary uses of quantitative data are to deduce findings, test theories, and explain things. And it was towards this third usage, explanation, that this study moved. Explanation is at its core dependent upon our ability to

provide definition to what is otherwise a nebulous concept. We knew that interdistrict open enrollment existed in Indiana because we could read about it in the state's legislative code and review a list of districts that accepted out-of-boundary transfer students compiled by the Indiana Department of Education. Yet both of these points, even if objectively true, were incredibly abstract in form because they failed to provide us with an understanding of what the practice actually looked like at the level of implementation. This lack of operational definition is a major shortcoming of previous research conducted on the topic. Researchers in other contexts appear to have viewed interdistrict open enrollment as a monolithic construct from which they could draw understandings of perception and impact. This comes despite the fact that perception and impact are not necessarily derived from whether the option exists in so much as how the practice is operationalized. To be frank, it seems somewhat strange for past research to assess the merits of the practice without first bothering to understand what exactly they were studying. That was a conceptual misstep that this study remedied.

Why a Survey?

Educational researchers have a number of inquiry methods at their disposal that they can put into use, be it the running of an experiment, analyzing existing datasets, or conducting interviews. Yet for researchers who want to assess current conditions quickly and in large measure, few methods are better than survey research. Ebel (1980) says that the value of good survey research resides in its ability to provide an actionable snapshot of conditions on the ground-level. He writes,

To identify common problems, to learn about circumstances associated with those problems to discover what seems generally effective in solving those problems are all appropriate tasks for survey research. Knowing exactly how things now stand represents an essential prerequisite to intelligent actions towards improvement (Ebel, 1980, p. 131).

Such points were exactly the aim of this study. By better understanding what interdistrict open enrollment looks like, those with positions of influence and authority are better equipped to make intelligent actions in relation to school choice and enrollment policies.

Beyond philosophical reasons for conducting survey research, there are a number of practical reasons the approach is appropriate for this context. Don Dillman (2014) identifies several advantages to the approach. It facilitates connecting information in order to answer a question, permits generalization with great precision so as to better understand a population, can be scaled to fit with the needs of a study, can be conducted via a number of modes or across various platforms, and can make efficient use of limited resources if planned well. Each of these traits were valued in this study, which sought to examine the practices of a finite population spread across the 36,000 square miles of the Hoosier state. Other methods, like conducting interviews, were cost and time prohibitive. Still others, like analyzing student achievement datasets in relation to open enrollment practices, failed to provide the definition desired in this study. Of all the research methods available, only survey research fulfilled the aims of this study.

Statistical Information Gathered

Sometimes the simplest pieces of information can provide the greatest level of illumination. That was the case with this study. The research conducted provided definition to an unexamined topic, which meant that it was important that the actual data collected be able to pinpoint the ways in which interdistrict open enrollment is conducted. To do so, we needed to move no further than reliance on descriptive statistics.

The use of descriptive statistics enables the researcher to distill a great deal of information into a handful of data points (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). This results in an increased ability to summarize and assimilate available information (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). This study

primarily employed one type of descriptive statistic – a frequency distribution – to ascertain what practices school corporations are using to respond to interdistrict open enrollment and how prevalent those practices are throughout Indiana. By doing so, the data collected gives form and definition to the practice. Similarly, since the study sought to frame responses within the practice of strategic management, responses were coded for their application to one of the five stages of strategic management as outlined in the conceptual framework. Patterns, or a lack thereof, were reviewed and discussed.

In addition to the use of frequency distributions, this study employed the use of crosstabs to determine the link between responses and corporation settings. Usually such correlations would be identified by either a chi-square test of independence or Fischer's exact test. However, the small sample sizes derived from different corporation settings inhibited the use of either of the two standard approaches, making crosstab analysis appropriate. Within the confines of this study, the nominal variables examined will be school corporation type (i.e. urban, suburban, city, or rural) and interdistrict open enrollment response. Determining if such connections exist is important because it provides further definition of how this particular state policy is implemented. If this research is able to determine the extent to which various school corporation settings engage with open enrollment practices and how they do so, later researchers could work towards examining the degree to which such practices are impactful or how they might be modified.

Researcher Positionality

Where or how a researcher is situated in relation to what he studies has been examined in detail as it relates to educational research (Bourke, 2014; Milner, 2007). Most often attention is given to positionality in qualitative studies, wherein a great deal of response interpretation based

on words and observed actions is done by the researcher and can be impacted by their own views on the subject. But just as we acknowledged earlier that study participants bring a level of interpretation to their engagement with an investigation, so too must we acknowledge that researchers bring to their work some level of subjectivity for which they must account. Peshkin (1988) recommends that the researcher seek and acknowledge from the outset their subjectivity related to their topic so that they can be more aware of how such a mindset might influence their work and its outcomes. Similarly, Banks (1998) finds that “[s]ocial science and educational researchers should strive for objectivity but acknowledge the subjective and objective components of knowledge are interconnected and interactive. Acknowledging the subjective components of knowledge does not mean that we abandon the quest for objectivity” (p. 6). That is, objectivity and subjectivity are not mutually exclusive states for the researcher. Sound research methods and practices can produce objective research even if the investigator brings bias to the table. It is simply more intellectually honest to acknowledge that bias from the outset.

I came to this study in large part because each step of my educational journey, whether as a student or professional, has been impacted by the availability of school choice options. These include stints working in an under-resourced parochial school as well as a reviving public high school, education in graduate programs that could be described as pro-school choice and pro-public school, and living and working in a state with an extensive school choice program. This is revealed less as a warning to the reader to be watchful of what biases I might include as the study is structured and executed and more as a reminder to myself that I come to the issue with a history that must be constantly checked so as to not unduly influence my work.

Reliability and Validity

The quality of a survey, just like any other research method, is dependent upon its ability to be deemed reliable and valid. Broadly defined, reliability refers to the stability and consistency of responses received while validity speaks to the degree to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure (Creswell, 2012). Though two distinct concepts, both notions are inexorably connected. Creswell writes, “If scores are not reliable, they are not valid; scores need to be stable and consistent first before they can be meaningful” (p. 159). Both play an important role in survey research and will be discussed here and in the sections of this chapter that follow.

Beginning with reliability, it’s pertinent to understand from whence notions of stability can be derived. Clear questions on the testing instrument and standardized testing procedures are two areas directly influenced by the researcher (Creswell, 2013). A third factor, participant mental state, is less controllable but somewhat influenced via the first two points. That is, a well-crafted instrument with standardized, easy-to-follow procedures can reduce confusion about what questions are asking and make the participant feel more at ease. Some researchers have found that reliability can suffer when a participant believes the information being obtained is of a personal nature or that there is a likelihood that their specific answers would be shared with others (Ferber, 1966; Withey, 1954). Reliability can also suffer when the instrument is poorly developed, the data poorly collected, and the results poorly analyzed (Zarkovich, 1966).

One of the primary ways to improve the reliability of an instrument is to pay careful attention to the instrument’s development (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Russ-Eft, 1980). Consideration must be given to who will answer the questions, how much time they might be willing to commit to responding, and the range of possible responses to a given question (Russ-Eft, 1980). Similarly, reliability can be enhanced by intentional selection of question types,

Careful wording of question stems so as to avoid ambiguity or jargon, and purposeful selection of response elements (University of Wisconsin Office of Quality Improvement, 2010). Careful screening of an instrument prior to distribution goes a long way towards ensuring that it is of sufficient quality to be considered reliable. Development of the survey instrument used in this study and the application of these principles will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

As for validity, what factors help ensure that the measurements are accurate? In the case of a survey, we explore three notions: content validity, external validity, and construct validity (Russ-Eft, 1980). Content validity is assessed by examining an instrument to determine subjectively whether or not it reasonably possesses the characteristics and components necessary for it to measure what it claims to measure. Such a process most often relies on content-area experts to review and provide feedback on an instrument. As for external validity, this is assessed based on whether or not the instrument behaves as it should once operationalized. It is dependent upon sampling methods, chiefly the degree to which an adequate representative population can be achieved. Poor sampling practices can result in drawing data from an inaccurate or incomplete sample, thus resulting in a sampling error that undercuts external validity (Owens & Bose, 1997). Similarly, nonresponse by the sample can also reduce the instrument's validity (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). However, the validity of an instrument can be increased by using a justifiable sampling method, instrument piloting, and response-checking. All three points will be discussed later in this chapter.

Construct validity poses perhaps the greatest challenge to a study. Researchers (and people in general) make sense of their environment or the things they encounter by the creation of categories or constructs. This sense-making is essentially a process of providing definition.

When a researcher creates a study and intends to analyze a phenomenon, they are required to make determinations about what is an accurate representation of an idea and how concepts are defined. Construct validity, then, is the degree to which what the constructs used by a researcher are actually representative of what the constructs purport to encompass (Westen & Rosenthal, 2003). It is worth noting that some contemporary scholars believe that construct validity is the only validity that exists, with other validity concepts (like those mentioned above) being mere components of this larger idea (Embretson, 2014). Regardless, Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002) point out that construct validity is fostered by four points: having a clear understanding of the study and constructs involved; carefully selecting questions or cases that match constructs; checking how well constructs actually match items meant to represent them; and revisiting construct definitions based on perceived fit with representations (p. 66).

At a practical level, construct validity can be strengthened on three levels. First, constructs can be based on an existing set of scholarship that provides them with definition. Second, representations of the constructs can be reviewed by content-area experts to ensure that they match the constructs being measured. Third, multiple representations of each construct can be used in order to more properly assess the fit between the construct and how it is being measured. This study addressed each of these points by grounding constructs in literature on both school choice and strategic management, using experts in educational leadership and business practice to assess whether or not the survey instrument measures what it claims, and including multiple questions relative to constructs so as to increase the likelihood of fit.

Setting and Participants

The research questions for this study established very clear expectations for the setting in which it took place and the types of people who served as research subjects. Because it explored

how Indiana's public school superintendents have responded to interdistrict open enrollment, the participants were initially limited to Indiana's traditional public school superintendents (that is, superintendents of public districts excluding charter school managers), which would have accounted for 289 individuals. However, a sample of this size was small, and the likelihood that all superintendents would respond was minimal. Accordingly, the decision was made to expand the sample to include superintendents' senior lieutenants identified as assistant or associate superintendents, which added an additional 112 potential participants. The expansion worked for two reasons. First, the work of superintendents and their primary deputies is similar, giving both sets of individuals an intimate understanding of the work of their corporations at the most senior level. Both have knowledge of the extent to which their corporations engage with interdistrict open enrollment. Second, expanding the sample pool to include assistant or associate superintendents ensured a more robust population from which responses could be garnered, bringing the pool to 401 people.

Agresti and Finlay (2009) assert that "[t]he ultimate goal of any study is to learn about populations" but that the practicality of completing such an exhaustive analysis often requires researchers to settle for simply engaging with a sample (p. 4). This study, however, need not suffer from that limitation. Working with a population of 401 individuals made it possible to reach out to each person who fit the study's sample criteria. Though the Indiana Department of Education's most recent listing of districts that participate in open enrollment numbered 149 corporations, discussions with superintendents and a review of corporate websites indicate that some participating districts are not listed in the state database. It could be concluded that either the state's publicly available data is incomplete or that corporations simply did not notify the department as required. To limit execution of the study to a sample delineated by the state's

available data would risk missing superintendents who lead corporations that engage in open enrollment. However, in light of the already small number of chief executives, it is possible to present the opportunity to participate in the study to the total population of Hoosier superintendents and their principal deputies. This results in a purposive sampling that, though reached in a somewhat unorthodox manner, identifies and engages with a specific population.

It is worth noting that the use of a purposive sample is somewhat odd in a quantitative study. In fact, research educators like Creswell (2012) tend to place such sampling methods under discussions of qualitative methodologies because they most easily facilitate the exploration of an in-depth phenomenon relative to a specified set of people or places. When you select a group to study with such specificity, you often lose the ability to take findings from that group and apply them to a larger population. Yet this study was different on two fronts. First, it sought to quantitatively explore a concept relative to a specifically defined, homogeneous group for which the existing population was relatively small. The use of random sampling strategies would have significantly reduced the total number of available respondents from an already low level of 401, increasing the likelihood of achieving a low survey response rate from which it would have been difficult to draw assumptions. Second, the use of purposive sampling is common practice with survey administration, especially for instruments put forward online (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). Though purposive sampling reduces the ability of the study to be considered representative of an entire population or to calculate accurate sampling error, researchers tend to look past these shortcomings due to the large numbers of responses obtained via online surveys. Considering that the findings of this study would be of greater value if a high number of potential participants responded, it became prudent to ensure that as many potential respondents

could engage with and complete the survey as possible. Doing so served to enhance the reliability of this study.

Although the study was open to all Indiana superintendents and associate or assistant superintendents, it was unlikely that all sample members will choose to participate. Leading a district is a big job, requiring time and attention that might not have been worth diverting to a doctoral study. Others might simply not have found participating in the study useful or worth the effort. Though steps taken to increase the likelihood of participation will be discussed in the sections that follow, it is worth pausing for a moment to discuss a desirable response rate. Unfortunately, “[t]here is no agreed-upon standard for a minimum acceptable response rate” (Fowler, 2002, p. 42). Neither major research organizations, like the American Educational Research Association, nor many major research journals have a standard for survey response rates (Saldivar, 2012). Even studies of response rates have provided mixed findings. For example, one market-based study from the Netherlands was shown to have a response rate of anywhere between 14% and 20% (Deutkens, Ruyter, Wetzels, & Oosterveld, 2004). It is hard to draw useful extrapolation from these results, though, given that the Dutch sample (members of the general public who had previously consented to a telephone survey and received an online survey) was so very dissimilar to the sample of this study (i.e. American professionals, high levels of education, etc.). Another study of young adults linked to a selective liberal arts college in the U.S. found response rates ranging from 17% for those with a weak affiliation to the institution to a high of nearly 60% from those with a strong affiliation, noting that those receiving some form of pre-notification or reminder responded at a rate of 37-40% (Porter & Whitcomb, 2007). Yet another study similarly found that rates of responses among college-educated individuals increased with the use of pre-notification measures (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, &

Levine, 2004). Though significant age differences exist between the samples of the previously mentioned studies (college-aged students) and those of this study (college-educated, mid- to late-career professionals), similar traits exist in terms of post-secondary educational attainment and familiarity with the sponsoring institution.

Turning to standards set for university research, the University of Texas, using the work of Hamilton (2003) and others in addition to data derived from multiple social sciences fields, holds that the average response rate for emailed surveys is 40% (University of Texas at Austin Center for Teaching and Learning, 2007). The University claims good response rates come in at 50% and very good response rates are at 60% or better. The 40% threshold is similar to guidance I received from my own mentor faculty. As such, if a response rate is calculated by dividing the number of completed surveys by the number of people contacted, the expected average response rate for a sample of 401 should be approximately 160 participants. Though it was hoped that greater participation could be obtained, as doing so would provide a more robust understanding of Indiana's open enrollment landscape and increases the study's validity, the target response rate for this study was set at 40%.

To identify the population of public school superintendents and associate/assistant superintendents in Indiana, a list of the state's public school corporations was taken from the Indiana Department of Education website and matched with both the district leaders' names and email addresses derived from websites and professional organizations. This identified the names and contact information for 401 superintendents and assistant superintendents. The list was alphabetized in an Excel workbook for easy transmission into an electronic database.

Data Collection Instrument

This study collected data via the administration of a survey, which will be examined in greater detail in this section by addressing considerations related to survey design and execution, survey format considerations, the distribution method, the instrument design, and instrument testing.

Considerations Related to Survey Design and Execution

Dillman (2014) is a proponent of tailored design survey models, which entails “customizing survey procedures for each survey situation based on knowledge about the topic and sponsor of the survey, the types of people who will be asked to complete the survey, the resources available, and the time frame for reporting results” (p. 16). This approach is built on the concept of social exchange, wherein respondent behavior in relation to the survey is motivated by the expected return on that behavior. Respondents engage with surveys so long as they can assess that the reward for doing so will outweigh any associated costs. The ability to do so quickly is paramount, as decisions about participation in a survey are usually made no later than two days after the opportunity is presented. Yet Dillman notes that one way to leverage social exchange as a means of promoting participation can be found in human nature. “Many of the things that humans do in life,” he writes, “involve helping others. These actions are particularly satisfying if the beneficiaries are individuals or groups to which someone belongs or from which they receive long-term benefits” (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014, p. 25). This sense of membership and advantage was present in this study considering that the survey population consisted of public school superintendents being asked by a fellow public school leader affiliated with a public university to assist in a study that was designed to provide better understanding of a topic that impacts their daily work.

Additionally, Dillman (2014) says that social exchange characteristics can be effectively employed by taking advantage of certain practices. Those practices are outlined in Appendix A. Of these, two are worth noting in relation to this study. The first is the admonition to specify how survey results will be used. The better respondents understand the end impact of their time and candor, the more likely they are to feel engagement is worthwhile. As a result, this study outlined the benefit participation would have on better understanding the practice of open enrollment and how that information could impact professional practice. The second practice worth noting is the reliance upon sponsorship from a legitimate organization. Contemporary survey administration has been hindered by a proliferation of bad actors that seek information for nefarious purposes (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). This is especially true for surveys distributed via electronic means, wherein an errant click on an infected weblink can create long-term problems for respondents. One way for a survey to avoid being lumped in with spammers or phishers is to be linked with a respected institution. As research associated with a doctoral dissertation, Indiana University (IU) provided that legitimated sponsorship. IU has a long history of forming educators and providing relevant policy analysis. This institutional reputation assisted in promoting a willingness to engage with social exchange.

Along with promoting social exchange, Dillman (2014) recommends finding ways to minimize participation costs associated with survey administration. Steps that can reduce participation costs are outlined in Appendix B. Many of the items noted by Dillman can be addressed via good survey design. For example, reducing complexity and avoiding subordinating language are both byproducts of how questions are worded. Reducing the burden of length is a result of ensuring that the questions posed efficiently meet the aims of the study. Steps like these are ultimately a corollary to another critical factor: trust. Participants must have faith that the

requests being made of them are legitimate and that their engagement with the process will come without harm. Dillman recommends engendering this sense of trust by providing participants with means of assessing the authenticity of the survey and the legitimate sponsorship of the project, emphasizing data security and confidentiality, and exhibiting professionalism in all communications. This study addressed those points explicitly in communication with participants. That communication is presented as Appendix C. Dillman asserts that mixing communication modes (i.e. sending an introductory letter, emailing the survey link, and including an overview page for the survey) provides the researcher with an opportunity to increase benefits, decrease costs, and build trust (p. 47). To that end, this study did just that.

Survey Format Considerations

Having reviewed major considerations related to survey design, we can now turn our attention to the survey instrument itself. The better design given to the survey, the more valid their responses are likely to be. Surveys are at their core questionnaires that are dependent upon issues like question content (i.e. what the questions unearth), question format (i.e. open or closed-ended), response format (i.e. options and structure), and order (i.e. what is asked first, second, etc.). Since this study sought to determine how Indiana superintendents have responded (or, perhaps more accurately, are responding) to interdistrict open enrollment and whether those responses resembled strategic management practices, certain question content groups needed to be addressed. One set of questions drew forth respondent demographic information, like school corporation type and years experience as a superintendent. Another set of questions determined what types of open enrollment responses superintendents have taken, be they focused on a broad theme (like “tradition” or “academic excellence”) or a specific area of action (like increased advertising, curricular changes, or capital projects). And still another set of questions established

whether or not superintendent actions resemble strategic management practices in other industries. Since the responses were viewed through the strategic management framework, questions were aligned to one of the five stages of strategic management practice as outlined in this study's section on its framework, namely articulation, analysis, alignment, implementation, and evaluation. The correlation between framework components and questions was coded to assist in data analysis. Though interconnected, each question content area provided a distinct view of the topic, leading to a study that was both more nuanced and more meaningful.

Relatedly, question format is often dictated by the type of information sought, whether it is to guide how a respondent answers or to meet a specific need of the survey (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). For example, since the study needed to determine what type of corporation the superintendent led, a closed-ended question based on National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) definitions that provided articulated choices of urban, suburban, city, or rural made sense. These responses were easily computed into a frequency table that helped the researcher draw conclusions about the type of open enrollment responses employed by superintendents of different types of districts. If the question had been left open-ended, it's likely that the number of responses would have been so varied that it would have been impossible to determine whether or not a given response to open enrollment was linked to district type. To that end, analysis was supported by using closed-ended or partially closed-ended questions.

Turning to response options, the manner by which a respondent engaged with a question in this study was dependent on the type of question that is asked. Open-ended questions simply needed a place to record a response. Closed-ended or semi-closed ended questions relying upon nominal data required that options be provided from which the respondent could choose. Some of those responses, such as those relative to school district type (i.e. urban, suburban, etc.), drew

upon definitions used by outside entities (in this case, the NCES) and were clearly defined for the participants. Other responses needed to be generated prior to delivery of the survey, and their generation required a two-step process. First, the researcher defined potential answers for each question based upon his knowledge of the field. Responses were structured following Dillman's (2014) recommendations for nominal closed-ended questions (that is, limiting the number of responses for a given question, avoiding unequal comparisons, randomizing response orders)(p. 168). Once a body of responses was developed, the questions were previewed among senior-level school district leaders, educational leadership doctoral students, and retired superintendents. Feedback from these groups enabled additions, deletions, or adjustments as warranted.

As for question order, Dillman (2014) finds that "[a] good question order will both motivate respondents to complete the question and the questionnaire and minimize question order effects" (p. 229). Careless ordering can result in having answers primed by or anchored to previous responses or respondents abandoning the survey altogether, which ultimately impacts the study's quality (p. 234). This means that care had to be given to determining the best sequence for posing questions and revealing information. Similarly, questions were grouped by like subjects to facilitate understanding and limit cognitive jumps.

As established earlier, steps to heighten the instrument's reliability and validity were undertaken during the instrument design stage. Dillman's guidelines for question construction, noted in this section, guided the manner by which survey items were formed. Reliance upon feedback from content-area experts and existing literature aided in question development. Correlation between the stages of strategic management practice and school corporation decisions was assessed by a cadre of colleagues with training in both fields as well as by a

faculty mentor. Moreover, the total survey instrument was reviewed by a staff member of Indiana University's Survey Research Center to check for technical soundness. Taking such ensured that the survey measured what it claimed to measure and could produce consistent responses.

Distribution Method

Considerations of cost, population characteristics, and time constraints must be made when selecting whether to administer a survey in person, by telephone, by mail, or electronically. Even the ease with which collected information can be converted into a usable dataset and analyzed impacts a researcher's consideration of what type of survey method to employ. Several characteristics of this study guided the distribution mode. First, I needed to be able to reach a far-flung population of busy public school superintendents. Second, I wanted the study to be efficient in its use of time and resources, both for the respondents and for me as a researcher. Third, I sought a distribution and return method that would facilitate easy electronic manipulation of data for the purpose of creating a more thorough and efficient parameter analysis. Given these needs, an online survey model with a targeted 40% response rate was the most appropriate distribution method.

Dillman (2014) cites several advantages to online survey distribution. They include the prevalence of internet usage, which, thanks to readily available email addresses and websites, is true for the population being studied, and an increased familiarity with how computers and the internet work. In fact, Dillman points out that "surveys of special populations with high level of computer ability, such as college students, policy experts, and business executives, also are increasingly being conducted online, using web alone or in combination with another model" (p. 303). School superintendents, by the nature of their education and work, fit among these types of

individuals. In response to the increasing popularity of web-based surveys, Dillman developed a series of guidelines for the preparation and distribution of the model that I have included in Appendix D. I incorporated these guidelines as appropriate within this study.

Total Survey Design

Based on the considerations presented in the previous sub-sections, I employed the following survey design. Members of the sample were contacted first via a type-written letter sent through U.S. Mail that established the survey's purpose and usefulness, highlighted its connection to Indiana University and the educational leadership doctoral program, and conveyed a sense of confidentiality and data security. Survey participation was incentivized by promising the creation and delivery of an executive summary of the study's findings for the study's respondents. Shortly thereafter an email containing a link to an online survey hosted via Qualtrics, an online survey program utilized by Indiana University, was sent to participants, again highlighting purpose, sponsorship, and safety. The survey itself began with an introduction that highlighted the study's aims and reinforced safety concerns related to privacy and data. Next, questions developed and tested during the instrument creation phase discussed earlier were presented on a series of screens. A set of closed-ended demographic questions were presented that determine corporation type and the superintendents' level of experience. The survey then moved on to a series of partially closed-ended questions related to specific practices identified in previous literature as impacting school choice and grouped in the following categories: areas of focus (i.e. tradition, academic excellence, student engagement, etc.); mission and visioning; advertising and media; curricular changes; activities changes; facilities capital projects or technology upgrades; and business-related practices (i.e. strategic planning, SWAA analysis, program evaluation, etc.). Qualtrics provided the option for the order of response options to be

randomly scrambled so as to avoid the potential for response bias, wherein participants might be more inclined to select answers that appeared sooner in the sequence, and that tool was used. Following initial distribution of the survey, nonresponses were electronically tracked via Qualtrics and two follow-up email messages were sent at four and eight days after the survey opened to remind participants of the study and increase the likelihood of their engagement with the study. A thank you email was sent to participants following the survey's close 14 days after it opened.

The distributed survey can be found in Appendix E.

Instrument Testing

All surveys can benefit from instrument testing that includes feedback from content area experts. This not only ensures that the instrument functions in a valid, reliable manner but also that the survey's format is workable and maintainable across different platforms. In response, this survey received feedback via piloting with educational leadership doctoral students and retired superintendents to improve question structure, sequencing, and efficiency. The survey was also be piloted on different platforms (i.e. Windows-based computers, MacBooks, iPads, etc.) to determine whether or not the format of the survey was maintained across device types.

Response Checking

As noted in the section on reliability and validity, the study's validity was heightened by employing a practice of response checking once the survey was in operation. This was achieved by both verifying responses from selected superintendents who completed the study so as to ensure that responses were being consistently, accurately recorded and providing all participants with the option to leaving unscripted comments on the topic at the end of the survey so that those comments could be compared to the closed-ended data and checked for consistency. Though the

practice of response checking removes the layer of anonymity that is often favored in these types of studies, it added an extra layer of assurance that the information obtained was of consistent quality. Identifying superintendents to participate in the response checking was done by directly contacting superintendents that the researcher knew to seek their assistance and by providing all respondents the option of proffering unscripted comments. Though both actions increased the likelihood of biased responses, that bias was mitigated by raising the subject after the survey has been completed.

Data Collection Procedures

This study relied on information obtained via an online survey administered to Indiana's public school superintendents and assistant/associate superintendents. Using Qualtrics, an online survey composition and distribution program, subjects received the survey and two follow-up correspondence via their official email accounts. Once the participants submitted their surveys, responses were maintained in Qualtrics until downloaded for analysis in SPSS. Previous sections of this chapter addressed concerns about the validity of the data as impacted by the population selection. Reliability was heightened by the fact that question and response formats were piloted and presented in a consistent manner and that the execution of the survey was consistent across users thanks to its electronic format. Previous sections have also indicated that the instrument contained fields meant to elicit information related to the study's research questions. Given that questions of like content were grouped together in the instrument and connected to elements of the strategic management framework, those sections were coded accordingly to make their eventual analysis easier.

Data Analysis Procedures

Once the administration window closed, information gathered via Qualtrics was downloaded in a comma separated variable (.csv) format, converted to an Excel workbook, and checked for errors. The dataset was uploaded to SPSS for computation of statistical tests. Response frequencies related to types of actions superintendents have taken in regards to increased competition posed by open enrollment were found. This permitted a numerical representation of the dataset via frequency tables. Similar data sets were developed in relation to each stage of the strategic management framework. Conclusions were drawn from this information and are presented in Chapter Four.

Additionally, SPSS was used to compute a series of crosstabs to determine whether or not responses were connected to corporation setting. As noted earlier, information linking independent and dependent variables is normally derived from a chi-squared test of independence or, in the case of smaller sample sizes, the use of Fischer's exact test. These tests are usually employed because (1) they help researchers ascertain whether or not observed frequencies arose by chance or whether they are dependent upon a variable, (2) are appropriate for the analysis of nominal data, and (3) the populations being investigated are capable of providing a large pool of responses from which to provide an appropriate distribution (Agresti & Finlay, 2009). Ultimately, though, this third assumption – the presence of an adequately sized population – was not met due to the extremely limited number of responses derived from urban settings. Accordingly, the next most appropriate approach was to disaggregate the data by corporation setting and formulate the information into crosstabs to review similarities or differences that exist within setting-derived sub-samples. That information is presented in Chapter Four, too. (Though it would be possible to conduct a similar test relative to

superintendent characteristics (i.e. age, tenure, gender, etc.), the emphasis of the study is on corporation-level implementation as opposed to the personal characteristics of the leader.)

Limitations

Conducting a population study via the administration of a survey presented a series of unique challenges. Limitations could be found not only in the methods and instrumentation but also in relation to the target population. Accordingly, I anticipated the following items to have the potential to impact this study:

1. Population Changes: It was possible that the sample frame could be inaccurate by the time the survey is administered. Superintendents retire, change jobs, get fired, and die. Some school corporations might have had superintendent vacancies at the time the population is identified or the survey is administered, reducing the number of potential respondents.
2. Survey Engagement: The degree to which the population engaged with the survey could impact its success. A number of factors can influence the engagement levels, including if superintendents do not find the topic useful to their situation, are in a period of transition, or find themselves inundated with other work obligations. The study's practical nature and the methods employed to solicit participation were used to keep response rates high.
3. Single Distribution Mode: Relying on a single survey distribution mode risked that people adverse to the particular form will not respond (Dillman, 2014). At the same time, other modalities were utilized to make participants aware of the survey, which could have had an impact similar to administering the survey in a multimodal manner. Sending a letter to participants by mail informing them of the upcoming study and then administering the survey via the internet can meet the modality needs of participants. This study negated this limitation's impact by doing just that.

4. Language and Question Structure: Studies have examined the role that “lexical, logical, temporal, and computational issues” can play in the quality of survey data (Galasinski & Kozłowska, 2010). Such issues are often the result of technical problems with the way questions are worded or how the survey is structured. Problems stemming from these types of issues include participants providing answers even when they do not know what the right answer is, participants providing answers that they think are more favorable than the answer they might otherwise give, or participants misinterpreting the intent of a given question (Gromm, 2004). These problems are ultimately avoidable through careful attention to how language is used and questions presented, as was done in this study.
5. Issues Related to Reliability and Validity: Though careful instrument design and testing occurred, it is possible that unexpected issues related to reliability and validity could have arisen. This might have included respondents being intentionally dishonest or delegating their responses to a subordinate for completion among other options. It was hoped that the concept of social exchange covered earlier in this chapter and in the appendix would help to tamp down any perfidy or mischievousness. Specific steps were taken, from creating personal contact with the respondents to intentional design of the instrument to minimize negative impact on participants to the anonymous nature of the task, that should have engendered a sense of trust and honesty relative to the exercise. Moreover, I hoped that, as public figures who must adhere to high ethical standards, the study’s sample would be inclined to be honest and sincere in their engagement. However, short of a readily apparent attempt to mislead the research that is discovered during the data preparation phase, it was my responsibility as the researcher to take survey responses at face value and interpret them in the context of the data’s totality and the framework employed.

Summary

As illustrated in this chapter, the best method for assessing the current state of Indiana's public school superintendents' response to the practice of interdistrict open enrollment was through the execution and quantitative analysis of an electronic survey model distributed to the state's 401 public school superintendents and assistant superintendents. Doing so provided clearer definition to what open enrollment looks like at the ground level and whether or not the practice demonstrates clear ties to market-based strategies found in competitive industries.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The preceding chapters of this study established both the need to determine whether or not Indiana school district leaders have engaged in practices connected to the state's inter-district open enrollment program and the manner by which that information was to be gathered. Three questions emerged from those chapters:

1. What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?
2. Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation they lead?
3. Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?

Seeking an answer to these questions, a survey of Indiana school corporation leaders was conducted in the fall of 2017. This chapter presents the findings of research conducted to those ends.

What follows is an examination of the information gathered via the district-level leader survey. It starts with a brief discussion of the survey's response rates, which is followed by the presentation of key characteristics and perceptions gathered from the survey's participants. Then it moves sequentially through each of the study's three questions, presenting analyzed data pertinent to each question and a summary of each question's primary findings, before concluding with a cumulative summary of the study's findings.

Response Rate

As explained in Chapter Three, the study's survey was distributed to individuals identified as either superintendents or assistant/associate superintendents of Indiana public

school districts. An initial sample of 401 participants was identified and included on the survey distribution. However, email bounce backs and duplicate entries (as a result of individuals switching jobs but such changes not being reflected in publicly available information) resulted in an adjusted sample of 393 people. Of that sample, 163 submitted surveys, resulting in a 41% response rate, which met the study's aim of a 40% response threshold.

Respondent Demographics and Perceptions of School Choice

Before looking at what respondents said their districts are doing in relation to maintaining or increasing student enrollment, it would be helpful to know a bit about the individuals who chose to engage with the study. A majority of respondents (62 or 40%, $n = 155$) had been in their leadership role for two to five years at the time the survey was completed. An additional 29.2% of respondents had been in their positions six to ten years and 20.1% of respondents had been in their positions for more than ten years. Given the experience level of the survey's participants, it is likely that many had been in their positions for a sufficient length of time to develop an understanding of how school choice options had impacted their corporations.

Concerning school corporation representation, surveys were submitted from 136 of 289 Indiana districts, accounting for 47% of all Hoosier public school systems. Relatedly, data was collected from a variety of school corporation settings to ensure that the study highlighted the experiences of Indiana's diverse communities. School corporation settings were determined by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)(2015) data classification; definitions for each setting were presented in Chapter One and Chapter Three. Those settings were defined as follows:

1. City: A "[t]erritory inside an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City" (NCES, 2015, p. 1).

2. Suburban: A “[t]erritory outside a Principal City and inside an Urbanized Area” (NCES, p. 1).
3. Town: A “[t]erritory inside an Urban Cluster” (NCES, p. 1).
4. Rural: A “census-defined rural territory” not covered in the previous three definitions (NCES, p. 1).

NCES data stratifies each of these four settings into three further subgroups, creating a total of 12 school corporation locales. Doing so for this study would have resulted in miniscule sample sizes linked to each setting, so the setting categories were collapsed into the four primary divisions listed above. As a result, the NCES data identifies Indiana school corporations as being 76.5% rural (n = 221), 17.3% suburban (n = 50), 3.1% city (n = 9), and 3.1% town (n = 9). Survey responses were distributed among locale types as follows: rural – 72.4% (n = 117); suburban – 21.5% (n = 36); city – 4.3% (n = 7); and town – 1.8% (n = 3). The submitted survey data indicates a slight over representation of suburban and city responses and slight under representation of rural and town responses when compared to the state as a whole.

Just as it is important to know a bit about the survey participants’ backgrounds and settings, so too is it important to know a bit about how they view the impact of school choice policies on their corporations. Information of that manner can be useful when attempting to make sense of how a response was developed or an action undertaken. When asked to identify the degree to which school choice policies impacted their districts, 42.3% of respondents indicated that associated practices had a great impact, 42.3% indicated some impact, and 14.7% indicated little impact (n = 163). Only one respondent said that their corporation was in no way affected. When asked to assess the level of enrollment competition faced by their corporations, a third of respondents (32.5%) said they faced a lot of competition and over half (55.2%) said they faced

some competition (n = 163). A majority of respondents (56.5%) said their primary source of enrollment competition came from a neighboring public school corporation, whereas a little over a quarter (27.9%) said the same in regards to parochial schools (n = 161). Primary competition from online and charter school options was identified by approximately 13% of respondents.

Of the 163 survey respondents, 84.6% indicated that their corporation participated in interdistrict open enrollment (n = 138). An overwhelming majority of those respondents (106 or 77%) are from districts classified as rural. The remaining open enrollment sample consisted of 26 suburban-based leaders (18.8%), 7 city-based leaders (5.1%), and 3 town-based leaders (2.2%).

Findings: Research Question One

The study's first research question asked, "What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment? In terms of practice implementation, respondents were surveyed in regards to seven discrete areas in which their corporations may have undertaken actions "in response to maintaining or increasing open enrollment." The seven areas were as follows: policy changes, student activities, curriculum and instruction, partnerships, communications practices, communications content, and human capital. These seven areas were populated with a total of 40 distinct actions, which ranged from those which were fiscally neutral (such as changing the content of messages shared with the public) to those that would be costly (such as improving upon or expanding athletic facilities).

Respondents had the option of answering implementation questions regardless of whether or not their corporation participates in Indiana's inter-district open enrollment program. In response, the frequency of responses was subdivided between open enrollment participants and open enrollment non-participants for reporting purposes. Similarly, these questions did not employ the practice of forced response (i.e. the question had to be answered to advance in the

survey), so it was possible for participants to not answer questions and for the total number of logged responses to vary from question to question. The information obtained is presented below in frequency tables populated via a crosstabs analysis.

Policy Changes

Survey question 23 asked corporation leaders to identify whether or not they had undertaken three possible policy changes relative to maintaining or increasing enrollment. Those three actions were to establish or modify district enrollment caps, to establish or modify class enrollment caps, or to increase transportation availability. At its most basic level, systematic teaching and learning is an issue of capacity. Are there enough instructors, class sections, and resources to adequately teach students? Are there enough students in seats to generate revenue to fund instructors, sections, and resources? Are there adequate ways to ensure that students can get to and from school so that learning can take place? Capacity is linked to basic policy questions, like how many students can be accommodated in a classroom and how many students can be educated in a district. Policy responses are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Modification of School Board Policies in Relation to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=137)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Established/Modified District Enrollment Caps	38	27.7%	0	0%
Established/Modified Class Enrollment Caps	53	38.7%	2	9%
Increased Transportation Availability	25	18.2%	4	18.1%

Survey responses indicate that classroom-level policy modifications were most favored by open enrollment participants. 38.7% of open enrollment respondents indicated that they set or altered class enrollment targets; that percentage dropped to just over a quarter of respondents doing the same at the corporate level. In comparison, only 9% of non-participants set caps at the classroom level, and none indicated doing so at the corporate level. In terms of transportation policy, a near equal percentage of both camps (approximately 18%) increased transportation availability for students.

Student Activities

Survey question 24 focused on student activities and actions that corporations could have undertaken as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment. Respondents were asked to identify whether they had increased activities availability, expanded community service opportunities, or undertaken facility improvements or expansions. Open enrollment participants and non-participants identified improving extra-curricular facilities as their most common action; response rates for this indicator came in between 36% and 37% for both groups. Facility expansion, though, was undertaken by fewer than 20% of respondents. Compared to leaders of non-participating corporations, leaders of open-enrollment districts were more likely to indicate that they had increased the availability of student clubs (23.4% to 18.2%), arts programs (17.5% to 13.6%), and community service options for students (12.4% to 9.1%). One out of ten respondents said their corporations increased the availability of student athletic opportunities. Responses to question 24 are compiled in Table 2.

Curriculum and Instruction

Curricular and instructional actions were addressed in survey question 25. Respondents were presented with choices linked to changes that they might have pursued as they sought to

maintain or increase enrollment, be it by increasing program or resource availability, adjusting practice in relation to accountability data, or providing flexible learning environments.

Responses rates are presented in Table 3.

Curricular and instructional practices proved popular for open enrollment participants and non-participants alike. In fact, the top choices were the same regardless of whether or not the respondent's corporation participated in open enrollment. Both selected increasing access to or use of instructional technology as their most common practice. Both identified introducing or increasing access to career/technical education and college-level course offerings as their next favored responses. Open enrollment participants were more likely to change their curricular and instruction practice to improve publicly available accountability metrics (like graduation rates and test scores) than non-participants, at a rate of 40.9% compared to 31.8%.

Table 2

Student Activities Actions Taken in Response to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=137)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Increased the Number of Student Clubs	30	23.4%	4	18.2%
Increased the Number of Arts Programs	24	17.5%	3	13.6%
Increased the Number of Community Service Programs	23	12.4%	2	9.1%
Increased the Number of Sports	15	10.9%	2	9.1%
Improved ECA Facilities	51	37.2%	8	36.4%
Expanded ECA Facilities	27	19.7%	4	18.2%
Undertaken Other Student Activities Steps	21	15.2%	4	18.2%

Table 3

Curricular or Instructional Actions Taken in Response to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=137)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Adjusted Curriculum or Instruction to Improve Accountability Metrics	56	40.9%	7	31.8%
Introduced or Increased Career and Technical Education Courses	68	49.6%	12	54.5%
Increased Use Of or Access To Instructional Technology	85	62%	13	59.1%
Introduced or Increased AP and Dual-Credit Courses	76	55.5%	12	54.5%
Introduced Special Academic Programs, like Dual Language Immersion or Engineering	1	< 1%	0	0%
Increased Access to Flexible Learning Environments (i.e. Online or Alternative)	46	33.6%	7	31.8%

Partnerships

Another area to which school corporations might turn as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment is through the establishment or expansion of partnerships with businesses, higher education, or community entities. Respondents were asked about partnerships in survey question 28. Nearly half of all respondents indicated that their districts sought increased connections with businesses (75 of 157, or 47.7%), and open-enrollment districts indicated the pursuit of student internship opportunities at the same rate. Likewise, over 40% of respondents indicated that their schools sought greater association with higher education institutions, be they technical schools or universities. Response rates are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Partnerships Established in Relation to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=134)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Built New Partnerships with Businesses	64	47.8%	11	50%
Built New Partnerships with High Education Institutions	58	43.3%	9	40.9%
Coordinated Increased Student Access to Community Resources	32	23.9%	6	27.3%
Instituted or Expanded Internship Opportunities	64	47.8%	9	40.9%
Undertaken Other Steps Not Listed	25	18.7%	6	27.3%

Communications Practices

Survey question 26 asked respondents to choose from a number of potential communications-linked practices that could be employed for the purpose of influencing student enrollment. Response options ranged from developing specific communications plans to advertising to providing some sort of incentive to individuals who made enrollment referrals. Response rates are presented in Table 5, which indicates that both open enrollment participants and non-participants identified making improvements to their district website and creating or enhancing social media as their most common actions. However, open-enrollment participants engaged in these practices at a rate of nearly 70%, far in excess of the nearly 50% of non-participants who said the same. Open enrollment participants were also more likely to engage in advertising (52.6%), word-of-mouth campaigns (45.2%), and mailings or leafletings (39.2%) than their non-participating peers. Of the options presented, neither group favored providing incentives for enrollment referrals.

Table 5

Communication Actions Taken in Response to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=135)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Developed Building-Specific or District Communication Plans	36	26.7%	8	36.4%
Shared Information via Word-of-Mouth	60	45.2%	7	31.8%
Made Improvements to District Website	93	68.9%	10	45.5%
Advertised in Print, Digital, or Other Outlets	71	52.6%	5	22.7%
Created or Enhanced Social Media Presence	91	67.4%	12	45.5%
Hosted Open Houses or Visitation Programs	57	42.2%	9	40.9%
Distributed Mailings or Leaflets	53	39.2%	7	31.8%
Provided Incentives to Staff, Students, or Families Who Made Enrollment Referrals	4	3%	0	0%

Communications Content

Relatedly, question 27 explored the content of communications sent out by respondents, and their answers are summarized in Table 6. Though the degree to which open-enrollment participants and non-participants engaged in each practice differed somewhat, the sequence by which actions were undertaken from most often to least often was the same. Communicating student and staff achievements was most common and done by more than 60% of both groups. Emphasizing available resources or programming was conducted by nearly 60% of the two groups, too. Thematic emphasis, like talking about concepts of “tradition” or “excellence,” was

third most common, though seven percent more open enrollment districts engaged in this practice compared to closed enrollment districts. Next came highlighting accountability metrics, which was done at a rate of 55.6% by participants and 45.5% by non-participants, and focusing on connections to other entities (around 45% for both camps). Communicating online rankings, like those provided by news organizations and real estate websites, came in last among the options but was still practice by nearly 30% of respondents' districts in both groups.

Table 6

Content of Communications in Response to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=135)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Emphasized Accountability Metrics	75	55.6%	10	45.5%
Emphasized Student and Staff Achievements	88	65.2%	14	63.6%
Emphasized Available Programs or Resources	79	58.5%	13	59%
Emphasized Connections to Higher Ed, Businesses, Etc.	61	45.2%	10	45.5%
Emphasized Themes Like "Excellence" or "Tradition"	78	57.8%	11	50%
Emphasized Online School Rankings	38	27.9%	6	27.3%

Human Capital

Actions linked to human capital and communications responsibilities were explored in survey question 29. Respondents were provided five actions that connected messaging responsibilities to internal and external human resources. Responses are tabulated in Table 7. When it came to seeking expertise from outside their corporations, open enrollment participants and non-participants turned to marketing and public relations professions at rates between 20 and

27%. Internally, fewer than 12% of respondents reassigned existing staff to communications duties, but the most commonly reported practice was to simply add communications duties to existing staff members' responsibilities (total = 37.5%, n=157; participants = 37%, non-participants = 40.9%).

Table 7

Human Capital Actions Taken in Response to Maintaining or Increasing Enrollment

Action	Open Enrollment Participants (n=135)	Participant Percent	Open Enrollment Non-Participants (n=22)	Non-Participant Percent
Consulted With or Employed a Marketing Professional	37	27.4%	5	22.7%
Consulted With or Employed a Public Relations Professional	30	22.2%	5	22.7%
Hired Staff to Conduct District Communications Practices	35	25.9%	4	18.2%
Reassigned Existing Staff to Communications Duties	16	11.9%	2	9.1%
Added Communications Duties to Administrative Responsibilities	50	37%	9	40.9%

Summary of the Data Collected in Regards to Research Question One

The preceding tables reviewed survey responses categorically, exploring the extent to which Indiana school district leaders have undertaken specific actions as a means of maintaining or increasing student enrollment. The actions were disaggregated between corporations participating in Indiana's interdistrict open-enrollment program and those that are not. Such categorical review of the data provides some interesting information. For example, we can identify that a greater percent of open-enrollment participants undertake policy changes linked to

class size than do non-participants or that pursuing actions connected to curriculum and instruction is popular among open-enrollment participants and non-participants alike. To a certain extent, these types of findings are not all that surprising. That is, open-enrollment participants have chosen to engage with a program focused on attracting more students into a corporation's schools, so it makes sense for attention to be given to policies that impact the number of seats per course section. School systems as a whole are designed to foster teaching and learning, so curriculum and instruction initiatives should be both common and popular.

What is more revealing, though, is to look at the survey responses holistically. Of the 40 actions from which respondents could select, what was most commonly put into practice? Are there trends among the practices of open-enrollment participants and non-participants? Do the two groups pursue the same initiatives or do they differ in their focus?

The survey identified nine actions that were practiced or pursued by at least half of open-enrollment respondents. The included the following:

1. corporation website updates or improvements – 68.9%;
2. communication via social media platforms – 67.4%;
3. emphasizing student and staff achievement in communications – 65.2%;
4. increasing access to or use of instructional technology – 62%;
5. emphasizing available resources in communications – 58.5%;
6. emphasizing themes, like “tradition” or “excellence,” in communications – 57.8%;
7. emphasizing accountability metrics in communications – 55.6%;
8. increasing access to AP and dual credit courses – 55.5%; and
9. advertising in print, digital, or other media outlets – 52.6%.

Seven out of the nine most frequently cited actions – including the three most frequently cited in the survey – touched on communications, both what was said and how it was delivered. The remaining two actions, increasing access to instructional technology and AP or dual-credit courses, were connected to capital projects and instructional practices.

In comparison, districts that do not participate in open enrollment had seven practices of which more than half of respondents identified as being in place in their corporation. They included the following:

1. emphasizing student and staff achievements in communications – 63.6%;
2. increasing access to or use of instructional technology – 59.1%;
3. emphasizing available resources in communications – 59%;
4. increasing access to AP and dual-credit courses – 54.5%;
5. increasing access to career and technical education courses – 54.5%;
6. built new partnerships with businesses – 50%; and
7. emphasizing themes, like “tradition” or “excellence,” in communications – 50%.

Three of the practices dealt with the content of public communication, whereas four of the practices focused on instructional or resource availability. This demonstrates a discernible difference between actions practiced in open enrollment and closed enrollment districts.

Findings: Research Question Two

The study’s second research question asked, “Is there any correlation between superintendent response (to open enrollment competition) and the type of corporation that they lead?” The aim of this question was to determine whether or not a school corporation’s setting – city, town, suburban, or rural – might influence the manner in which its leaders chose to engage with increased market-based competition for student enrollment. Though survey participants

were provided with the opportunity to indicate the implementation of 40 distinct actions, review of this question was limited to actions with which over 50% of open enrollment participants engaged. This resulted in a winnowing of the potential responses to nine distinct practices as outlined in the summary of findings for the first research question.

In regards to the analytic approach, each participant could respond that they were undertaking an action or that they were not. This created a nominal data set for each question wherein respondents would select a “yes” or a “no.” Analysis of nominal data of this nature is usually conducted by running a Chi-squared test to determine if a relationship between two variables is significant; the parameters of the approach are discussed in the chapter on research methodology. In this instance, however, the use of a Chi-squared analysis was not possible because some of the reported values of the response cells were too small and failed to meet the test’s criteria. When datasets are too small to conduct a Chi-squared test, the next logical option is to run a Fisher’s Exact test. The Fisher’s test functions similarly to a Chi-squared for small datasets, but it has the requirement that data be configured in a 2X2 format. Doing so was not possible in this instance because the comparison being conducted was one that relied on four setting types, not two. To reduce the analyzed data to only the most common settings for our respondents (suburban and rural districts) would inhibit a review of information in relation to corporations based in cities and towns. As such, the application of Fisher’s Exact test was ruled out. The remaining option was to present the information via crosstabs, which was done in Table 8 of this study. Results for this section are presented based on corporation setting as detailed below.

Table 8: Response Summary Based on Corporation Setting

			Corporation Setting				Total
			Town	Suburban	Rural	City	
Updated or Improved Website	Yes	Count	2	14	70	7	93
		% within Action	66.7%	53.9%	70.7%	100%	
	No	Count	1	12	29	0	42
% within Action		33.3%	46.1%	29.3%	0%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Created or Enhanced Social Media Presence	Yes	Count	1	16	67	7	91
		% within Setting	33.3%	61.5%	67.7%	100%	
	No	Count	2	10	32	0	44
% within Setting		66.7%	38.5%	32.3%	0%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Emphasized Student or Teacher Accomplishments	Yes	Count	2	13	68	5	88
		% within Setting	66.7%	50%	68.8%	71.4%	
	No	Count	1	13	31	2	47
% within Setting		33.3%	50%	31.3%	28.6%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Increased Access To, Use Of Instructional Technology	Yes	Count	1	13	65	6	85
		% within Setting	33.3%	50%	64.4%	85.7%	
	No	Count	2	13	36	1	52
% within Setting		66.7%	50%	35.6%	14.3%		
Total		Count	3	26	101	7	137
Emphasized Available Programs or Resources	Yes	Count	2	13	59	5	79
		% within Setting	66.7%	50%	59.6%	71.4%	
	No	Count	1	13	40	2	56
% within Setting		33.3%	50%	40.4%	28.6%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Emphasized Themes	Yes	Count	2	14	57	5	78
		% within Setting	66.7%	53.8%	57.6%	71.4%	
	No	Count	1	12	42	2	57
% within Setting		33.3%	46.2%	42.4%	28.6%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Emphasized Accountability Metrics	Yes	Count	3	12	56	4	75
		% within Setting	100%	46.2%	56.6%	57.1%	
	No	Count	0	14	43	3	60
% within Setting		0%	53.8%	43.4%	42.9%		
Total		Count	3	26	99	7	135
Increased Access to AP and Dual-Credit Courses	Yes	Count	1	13	56	6	76
		% within Setting	33.3%	50%	55.5%	85.7%	
	No	Count	2	13	45	1	61
% within Setting		66.7%	50%	44.5%	14.3%		
Total		Count	3	26	101	7	137
Advertised in Print, Digital, or Other Media	Yes	Count	1	13	56	6	76
		% within Setting	33.3%	50%	55.5%	85.7%	
	No	Count	2	13	45	1	61
% within Setting		66.7%	50%	44.5%	14.3%		
Total		Count	3	26	101	7	137

Town-Based Corporations

The number of respondents from corporations based in towns was quite small, with only three district-level leaders from three distinct corporations providing information accounting for 2.2% of the study's total participants. Despite the fact that their responses account for approximately one-third of similarly-situated corporations in the state, such a small sample size inhibits drawing meaningful conclusions about actions that districts in this setting have taken in relation to inter-district open enrollment. That said, we can still note that the response summary presented in Table 8 indicate these corporations all communicate information about accountability metrics, like test scores and state letter grades, as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment. They appear more likely to have updated their corporation website and communicated about student or teacher accomplishments, available resources, and specific themes towards the same ends. They appear less likely to have engaged with social media, increased access to or availability of instructional technology and advance courses, or to have advertised their corporation in any form. These points notwithstanding, there is no way to confidently assess whether or not such responses are representative of town-based school corporations as a whole.

Suburban-Based Corporations

As noted at the start of this chapter, there are 50 corporations in the state that are labeled by the NCES as being situated in suburban settings. Representatives from 34 (68%) suburban districts responded to this survey. Of those 34 districts, 26 respondents from 25 corporations (or half of all Indiana's suburban districts) accounted for 19% of the open enrollment sample. As shown in Table 8, nearly six in ten respondents indicated that their corporation had created or enhanced their use of social media as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment. This was

the only action for which suburban respondents indicated a clear and substantial preference. Of the remaining eight options, slightly more than half (53.9%) reported updating their district website or communicating select themes as enrollment-related strategies. Slightly less than half (46.2%) said that they emphasized accountability metrics to the same ends. The respondents were evenly split on five practices – emphasizing student/teacher accomplishments and available resources, increasing access to or use of instructional technology and Advanced Placement or dual-credit coursework, and advertising – indicating that corporations in this setting appear neither more nor less likely to undertake these actions.

Rural-Based Corporations

Responses from rural-based school corporation leaders constituted the largest sample subgroup. 101 rural-based respondents said that their corporations participate in Indiana’s inter-district open enrollment program; their responses account for 73.3% of the open enrollment sample. Relatedly, rural leaders’ responses are can be traced to 92 distinct corporations, or 41% of all rural districts in the state.

In reviewing reported actions undertaken by rural leaders as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment as illustrated in Table 8, the most common survey responses from this subgroup closely align to the most commonly reported actions of the open enrollment group as a whole. This is not surprising given that a high volume of responses received from rural-based respondents would influence the open enrollment group’s overall response pattern. To that end, it would be redundant to repeat the list that appeared earlier in this chapter. However, the available information reveals an interesting picture of rural-based respondents’ practice. For each of the nine actions reviewed, these participants were more likely than not to say that their corporation had undertaken a given practice. Engagement ratios ranged from being 2.4 times more likely

than not to update the corporation website to being 1.2 times more likely than not to advertise or increase the availability of AP and dual-credit courses. Taken collectively, the data indicates that corporations situated in rural settings are undertaking a multiplicity of actions as a means for maintaining or increasing student enrollment.

City-Based Corporations

Similar to the data collected from town-based respondents, the sample size for city-based participants was small at just seven district leaders. Unlike the city-based sample, however, those seven respondents account for 77.8% of all similarly situated corporations in Indiana ($n = 9$). So though small in number, the sample appears large enough for conclusions to be formed about how city-based corporations have responded to enrollment competition.

In reviewing the data in Table 8, engaging with online or mobile communication platforms were identified as the most common action undertaken by city-based respondents to maintaining or increasing district enrollment. 100% of respondents from this setting said their corporations had updated their website or utilized social media. 85.7% of this subgroup also reported expanding instructional technology, increasing the availability of advanced coursework, and advertising. Approximately seven in ten (71.4%) said they communicated student and teacher accomplishments, the availability of resources or instructional pathways, and themes like “innovation” or “excellence.” The least frequently reported action – communicating performance on accountability metrics – was still practiced by a majority of city-based respondents (57.1%).

Summary of the Data Collected in Regards to Research Question Two

It is not possible for this study to determine if there are any statistically significant relationships between respondents’ corporation settings and their responses. Indeed, even drawing meaningful assumptions from each of the NCES-defined settings is not possible given

that response rates linked to town-based corporations were derived from such a small sample. However, information from the remaining three settings – suburban, rural, and city – is illuminating. Suburban responses accounted for 50% of similarly situated districts in the state and showed only one action – creating or enhancing the corporation’s social media footprint – to be substantially enacted by leaders in these settings. Suburban leaders likewise reported no clear pattern of engagement with a majority of the other actions undertaken by Indiana school corporations with the intent of influencing student enrollment.

In contrast, respondents from rural or city-based corporations demonstrated a greater propensity to clearly engage with a variety of actions. Both sets of respondents represented a substantial contingent of corporations within their setting types. Rural-based respondents engaged with each of the most commonly cited practice actions at rates of between 55 and 64%. They were more than twice as likely to update or improve their websites, create or enhance their social media presence, and emphasize student and teacher accomplishments in communications than to not pursue these practices. This data suggests that rural-based corporations are seeking to impact their enrollment through a multiplicity of means. Similarly, city-based respondents were six to seven times more likely than not to undertake five of the nine most commonly reported actions: updating or improving their website, creating or enhancing their social media presence, increasing access to or use of instructional technology, increasing access to AP and dual-credit courses, and advertising in some form. They, too, appear to be enacting multiple enrollment-linked practices but with a higher rate of unity within their setting than that found in other settings. This data is perhaps the most significant in relation to the second research question given that these responses account for 77% of similarly-situated districts in the state.

Findings: Research Question Three

The study's third research question asked, "Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?" As outlined in previous chapters, such a practice would be predicated on the following five characteristics: articulation of a strategic goal or objective; analysis of a corporation's existing strengths and weaknesses, both internally and in relation to potential competitors; alignment of corporate resources for the purpose of meeting the goal or objective; implementation of practices or actions meant to lead the corporation towards goal attainment; and evaluation of the impact of the preceding actions. To that end, this study's survey instrument included questions linked to each of the five strategic management components. An open enrollment respondent who answered the questions in a manner that indicated specific actions or practices within each of the five components could be said to employ an approach to open enrollment similar to the strategic management framework.

Given that the application of the strategic management framework in this instance is linked to the development of a response to the practice of interdistrict open-enrollment, analysis of data collected for this research question was limited to the 138 respondents who indicated that their corporation participated in the open-enrollment program. Once the modified sample was set, it was then possible to move sequentially through the strategic management components.

Articulation

The first component of the strategic management framework is the articulation of a strategic goal or objective that aligns with an institution's mission and/or vision. To that end it was necessary to first determine if respondents' corporations had a stated mission and/or vision before determining if they had set any strategic goals or objectives relative to enrollment. Survey question nine asked respondents whether or not their district had undertaken a process to define

its mission and vision. Of the open-enrollment sample, 117 (84.8%) indicated the affirmative. Similarly, survey question 10 asked whether or not the respondent or the respondent's school board had articulated increased enrollment as a goal suitable to pursue under their corporation's mission. Of the 117 open-enrollment respondents with a stated mission or vision, only 40 indicated that they or their corporation had set increasing enrollment as a mission-driven objective. These data points are summarized in Table 9 and Table 10.

TABLE 9

Participant Respondents Who Defined a Mission or Vision

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Articulated mission/vision	117	20	1	138
Action %	84.8%	14.5%	.7%	100

TABLE 10

Participant Respondents Who Linked Mission and Vision to Enrollment Growth

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Increased Enrollment as Suitable Mission/Vision Goal	40	77	0	117
Action %	34.2%	65.8%	0%	100

Placing this latest statistic in context, 40 of 138 respondents (29%) from open-enrollment districts have increasing enrollment as a stated goal; those 40 respondents account for approximately one-quarter (24.5%) of the total sample.

Analysis

Having met the threshold for articulation, the remaining sample of 40 respondents could be reviewed in relation to the second stage of the strategic management framework, analysis.

Organizations looking to strategically place themselves within a changing or competitive market will not only look at their own strengths and struggles in relation to their objectives but also at how they compare with potential competitors who hold similar goals. Considering these points, three survey questions were used to determine the degree to which respondents employed some sort of analytical practice. Question 11 provided a list of commonly employed tools for gathering information, from conducting facility studies to distributing stakeholder surveys, and respondents were asked to identify which practice(s) they had undertaken. Question 14 asked respondents whether or not they tracked the number of students gained or lost due to interdistrict transfers. Both questions could be perceived as means for gathering data about internal operations. Question 12, which focused on external pressures, asked respondents whether or not they considered the actions of neighboring districts when completing strategic planning exercises. While a robust strategic management practice will include analysis of internal and external factors, there is no commonly agreed upon analytical threshold. For the purposes of this study, respondents were considered to have met the analysis component of the framework if they indicated that they had undertaken some sort of analytic practice, be it internal, external, or both. The revised sample's responses are summarized in Table 11.

Responses indicate that all of the remaining 40 respondents undertake some sort of analysis of their capacity, needs, or competition in relation to their ability to meet their stated objectives. A majority of the respondents undertook multiple actions to gather information about their corporation's strategic capabilities; respondents conducted an average of six practices to gain information about their district's needs. Five respondents indicated that their analytical approach focused solely on internal items and excluded consideration of neighboring corporations' capabilities or actions in relation to their own. One respondent indicated that they

track student enrollment transfers and consider the actions of neighboring districts but that they have otherwise not explored their own district's strengths or needs.

Table 11

Summary of Respondents' Analytic Practices

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	Total
Q11. Undertake Common Analytical Practice	39	1	40
Action %	97.5%	2.5%	100
Q12. Consider Neighboring Practices When Planning	35	5	40
Action %	87.5%	12.5%	100
Q14. Track Inter-district Transfer Gains or Losses	40	0	40
Action %	100%	0%	100
Undertake at Least One Practice in Questions 11, 12, or 14	40	0	40
Action %	100%	0%	100

Alignment

Organizations that have stated a strategic objective and analyzed their ability to meet it can begin the process to align their resources to make attainment of the objective more likely. In the case of a school corporation that has articulated maintaining or increasing enrollment as a primary objective, the alignment of school and district resources would be expected to create an environment conducive to that end. Similar to the analysis stage, there is no hard and fast rule as to what resources should be aligned with the objective; in many cases the objective dictates how the alignment takes place. It is not uncommon, though, for financial and human resource, capital projects, or strategic partnerships to be adjusted in pursuit of the desired outcome. Given the variety of options, this study relied on four survey questions to determine whether or not respondents' districts had engaged in some sort of resource alignment linked to open enrollment.

Question 16 asked whether or not funds were explicitly directed towards attracting transfer students. Question 19 asked whether or not building-level leaders were expected to develop resources (like facilities, programs, or courses) with the intent of increasing enrollment. Question 20 inquired about whether or not local partners, like businesses or civic organizations were engaged in policy development or district improvement efforts linked to open enrollment. Question 21 posed whether or not decisions linked to capital projects, instructional technology, or other improvement practices were connected to increasing student enrollment. Responses to each of these questions are summarized in Table 12.

Taking the presented options as a whole, 34 of 40 respondents (85%) said that they explicitly undertook a practice to align their corporation's resources with their stated goal of increasing enrollment. The most common alignment steps were to have building-level leaders work to develop resources or to link capital projects and district improvement efforts to attracting new students. Nearly half of the respondents said that they had directed funds towards practices meant to increase enrollment. Interestingly, five respondents, or 12.5% of the remaining sample, affirmatively answered each of the questions.

Six respondents, or 15% of the revised sample, said that they undertook no step to align their resources. In doing so, these six respondents did not demonstrate a full match with the strategic management framework.

Implementation

An organization's leaders can begin to implement specific goal-directed actions once they have articulated their objective, analyzed their capacities and needs, and aligned their resources to support the goal. The type or number of implementation activities an organization pursues will be dependent upon the organization's needs. This study relied on seven questions,

questions 26 through 29, to discern the actions districts might have taken in response to articulating a goal to maintain or increase student enrollment. A detailed analysis of the specific implementation actions undertaken by the survey's respondents was presented in the analysis section for the first research question. Rather than present those specific actions again, survey participant responses were reviewed and summarized categorically by question. The data is presented in Table 13.

Table 12

Summary of Respondents' Alignment Practices

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Q16. Directed Funds	18	22	0	40
Action %	45%	55%	0	100%
Q19. Resource Development at the Building Level	25	14	1	40
Action %	62.5%	35%	2.5%	100%
Q20. Local Partners and Resource Development	7	33	0	40
Action %	17.5%	82.5%	0	100%
Q21. Enrollment Goal Linked to Capital Projects, District Improvement, etc.	25	15	0	40
Action %	62.5%	37.5%	0	100%
Undertook At Least One Alignment Practice in Q16, 19, 20, or 21	34	6	0	40
Action %	85%	15%	0	100%

Considering that each participant's setting would require a unique approach to maintaining or increasing enrollment, respondents were determined to have enacted the implementation stage if they affirmed using at least one implementation activity. As reported, 97.5% of open enrollment participants engaged in some form of implementation. Only one corporation reported participating in open enrollment but engaging in none of the identified

implementation activities. The range of activities identified ran from 0 to 30. Most respondents indicated that their corporation enacted multiple practices, with the sample averaging 17.5 distinct activities and at least one activity in five of the seven categories per respondent.

Table 13

Summary of Respondents' Implementation Practices

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Q23. Policy Change Action	24	16	0	40
Action %	60%	40%	0	100%
Q24. Student Activities Action	26	14	0	40
Action %	65%	35%	0	100%
Q25. Curriculum and Instruction Action	35	5	0	40
Action %	87.5%	12.5%	0	100%
Q26. Partnership Action	35	5	0	40
Action %	87.5%	12.5%	0	100%
Q27. Communication Practice Action	37	3	0	40
Action %	92.5%	7.5%	0	100%
Q28. Communication Content Action	29	11	0	40
Action %	72.5%	27.5%	0	100%
Q29. Human Capital Action	28	12	0	40
Action %	70%	30%	0	100%
Total With at Least 1 Cumulative Action	39	1	0	40
Total Action %	97.5%	2.5%	0	100%

Evaluation

The final component of the strategic management framework is an evaluation of whether or not the organization's efforts have led towards goal attainment. Evaluation is critical because it helps the entity make a determination as to staying the course, trying something new, or developing a new goal. For a school corporation engaged in enrollment competition, the evaluative approach can be pretty straightforward: determine why students are enrolling in or

withdrawing from the corporation and use that information to inform planning and practice. As such, this study asked two questions on enrollment evaluation. Question 30 asked respondents if their corporations gathered information on why students moved into or out of their schools. Question 32 asked if student mobility data was used to inform district planning. Similar to the framework's other components, respondents needed only to indicate that they were engaged in some sort of evaluation process. Responses to these questions are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14

Summary of Respondents' Evaluation Practices

Action and Action Percent	Yes	No	No Response	Total
Collect Entry and Exit Data	28	12	0	40
Action %	70%	30%	0	100
Use Mobility Data to Inform District Planning	35	5	0	40
Action %	87.5%	12.5%	0	100
Undertook Data Collection and Application	24	16	0	40
Action %	60%	40%	0	100

Based on the responses, 70% of respondents said that they gather information on what causes students to enroll in or leave their district, and 87.5% of respondents said that they use student mobility data to inform district planning. Relatedly, only 24 respondents (60%) from the reduced sample of 40 indicated that they gathered data on why students enrolled or unenrolled and used mobility data to inform planning. Only one of the remaining respondents did not demonstrate any form of evaluation in regards to maintaining or increasing enrollment.

Summary of the Data Collected in Regards to Research Question Three

Of the 138 respondents who indicated that their school corporations participate in Indiana's inter-district open enrollment program, only 40 (approximately 30%) said that their

organizations had set a strategic goal of maintaining or increasing enrollment. Conversely, over 70% of open enrollment participants have not articulated enrollment growth as a strategic objective, which would inhibit the application of the strategic management framework towards that end in their cases. An additional six respondents indicated no attempt to align their corporation's resources to the ends of increasing enrollment, while one respondent identified no steps taken to implement practices meant to attract new students and another said that their corporation did not undertake steps to evaluate root causes of student mobility and its impact on district planning. Thus, of an initial 138 respondents who could have applied the strategic management framework towards the goal of maintaining or increasing student enrollment, only 32 provided responses that would indicate their corporations conduct practices that mirror the framework. This accounts for 23.2% of the open enrollment sample and 19.6% of all leaders surveyed.

Of these remaining 32 respondents, 15 provided responses that would indicate the potential for more robust engagement with individual components of the strategic management framework. The evaluation component illustrated the potential for the most growth in relation to the process, as 12 respondents (37.5%) acknowledged that they were undertaking steps to increase student enrollment without collecting data on what factors influenced family decisions on enrolling or withdrawing from the corporation. Additionally, greater application of the framework could be found for some in relation to the analysis component, as five respondents (15.6%) answered in a manner that indicated they only analyzed internal capacity or needs when formulating plans to attract or retain students and in doing so failed to consider the actions of potential market competitors.

Cumulative Summary of Findings

Based on the preceding reporting of data, this study finds the following in relation to the three research questions:

1. Question: What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?

Finding: Leaders of Indiana school corporations participating in the state's interdistrict open enrollment program implemented a variety of actions as a means of maintaining or increasing student enrollment; a majority of the most commonly cited actions are linked to communications practices and content. Though some practice implementation overlap exists between open enrollment participants and non-participants, the two groups exhibit unique approaches to how they approach the practice of attracting and retaining students.

2. Question: Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation that they lead?

Finding: This structure of this study inhibited the determination of the presence or absence of a statistically significant relationship between corporation setting and responses to the practice of open enrollment, but observable differences in practice exist among corporations situated in cities, towns, suburbs, and rural areas.

3. Question: Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?

Finding: Approaches to maintaining or increasing enrollment that mirror the strategic management process can be found in the corporations of 23.2% of the open enrollment sample and 19.6% of all leaders surveyed. Though the framework could be in use in regards to other strategic objectives, the greatest barrier to applying the strategic

management framework in this instance was the failure of corporations to articulate maintaining or increasing enrollment as a strategic goal.

Contextualizing the Responses and Findings

Though this study was designed to be quantitative in nature, participants were provided the opportunity to offer short responses related to the topic of Indiana's interdistrict open enrollment program. Doing so served as a means of internal control for the study, as it permitted the researcher a relatively unprompted body of information against which responses could be compared. That is, a level of consistency should be found between what respondents select from closed-ended responses and what they would freely say without the constraints of a closed question. Beyond response checking, though, incorporating a short response option offered a source of contextualization for the origins of the reported data. Meaning-making can be difficult when simply reviewing response rates and patterns. That process can be eased by getting a glimpse, however brief, into the thought processes of respondents.

33 of the survey's respondents opted to respond to the following open-ended question: "Do you have any other thoughts on the practice of interdistrict open enrollment that were not covered by the questions in this survey?" A review of these responses revealed the emergence of certain themes, and some of those responses are shared here so as to provide a sense of context for the data presented earlier in the chapter.

First, motivations for why respondents chose to participate or forgo participation in the state's open enrollment program were commonly reported. Some of the respondents indicated that the actions they undertook had less to do with maintaining or increasing enrollment than they did with best practice. One respondent wrote:

"We do not focus on open enrollment. We focus on offering our students a quality education and making our schools student friendly. We strive to do well in the

area of school accountability and are continually improving our curricular offerings. It is our philosophy to focus on our students and not worry about another school corporation's students. If we are successful with our students, out of district students will be drawn to our corporation."

Another respondent shared that "many of our changes to curriculum offerings had more to do with providing greater opportunities for our current students rather than as an enrollment strategy. Student retention or recruitment as a result is more of a secondary consideration." This was echoed by yet another participant who said, "The primary focus is on 'keeping our own' and the secondary focus is on recruiting others. However, 'keeping our own' means keeping the 500 cash transfer students who are in our district currently."

Second, some district leaders shared comments that aligned with the communications-heavy responses highlighted in the survey's results. For example, one wrote that "the things that we have done have been done to maintain enrollments and guide perceptions of the district." Another shared that "it is a continual practice to ensure positive PR to combat the 'they are going to close' talk. We also work closely with local and county media outlets to get as much positive, free media as we can." Still another said that "[t]he better description of why we are doing these things is to keep our community informed of how their tax dollars are being used and justify the referendums we have passed."

Third, given that Indiana's open enrollment program has never been studied, there's little information available on exactly which students are moving from corporation to corporation and why they're choosing to transfer. The survey's respondents, though, were not shy in sharing opinions on these matters. As one reported,

"[I]n many instances children may be attending another school due to issues that are non-educational in nature. In part these include the at-risk family that is transient, those that prefer another district due to convenience to work or home, and athletics."

Others were certain that demographic factors influenced movement. A participant shared that financial hardships were at play. They said:

“In our socio-economically depressed area, very few people tend to choose a school based on anything to do with performance. We were losing students when our schools were Cs and we’re still losing students with higher grades. Poverty is the biggest issue. There are few nice homes and almost no decent paying jobs in our community. [Our students’] parents are chasing jobs or moving in with family members. Most of our ‘transfers in’ state that it is for convenience to the parents.”

Yet another looked towards movement from economically depressed areas:

“Out of district students come to us from [Town] and [Big City]. Many are academically low, and the time and cost to remediate them are high. We get increased state funding at the cost of a lower accountability grade.”

One superintendent seemed certain that transfer status had less to do with who a person was or where they were coming from than a sense of being chronically disaffected. “Some of the students, and their parents, looking for another school setting,” he opined, “seem to be vagabonds searching for a ‘right fit’ that they never find.”

Interestingly, issues of race were not explicitly mentioned by any of the survey’s participants, but the concept of social stratification and segregation was raised by some. One strongly worded response addressed the concept as follows:

“Open enrollment is a mechanism for legitimizing subtle and overt segregation. It has been sold as if it is giving poor families choice, but truly poor families do not have the capacity to exercise that choice. Therefore, rather than expecting people to contribute positively to the community where they live, families are allowed to take funding from that area and go to a school they ‘perceive’ to be better. It is a means of social sorting spiraling some neighborhoods into despair. It has perpetuated a division of socioeconomic strata producing more and more homogenous groups. It has left neighborhoods without the connective fiber of all the children knowing each other because they go off in different directions to school. The use of public dollars to encourage even more of this is just irresponsible. Administrative resources are distracted away from providing solid instruction and service to playing these competitive marketing games as a matter of revenue generation.”

And just as the preceding respondent identified this social sorting, a leader from a closed-border district shared the following:

“[W]e are located directly adjacent to a failing school district that is now under state control. Many families want their children to attend our schools, but our current policy does not allow for them to attend unless they can prove residency. This is monitored very closely.”

Other leaders expressed that the concept of us-versus-them was less static. One district leader highlighted a financial reality that instructional costs are paid for in part by tuition dollars but that capital projects are funded by local tax dollars. For her, the issue was one of dollars and cents connected to available space. She wrote:

“We, like other high performing districts near us, do not accept out of district students because we do not have the space. To build schools to address an even greater growth in enrollment with open enrollment would force local taxpayers to pay for schools for students whose parents do not pay property taxes in our district.”

Similarly, one respondent felt that the issue had less to do with demographics than it did with the degree to which districts could effectively marshal their resources towards a given end. She wrote,

“[A]t the end of the day, we are all looking for additional students from the same ‘pot,’ but we all have specific disadvantages that make it fairly competitive. All of this works while [a large neighboring district] continues to hemorrhage students, but sooner or later they will get their act together. When that happens, the surrounding districts will likely suffer the consequences due to funding constraints.”

Fourth, the concept of funding highlighted in the preceding comment was the most commonly cited topic among the free response option. This comes as no surprise given that 41% of the survey’s open enrollment participating respondents identified the chance to increase revenues as a primary means for pursuing the practice. Though some respondents indicated that they did not need to seek additional funds from transfer students due to already growing

enrollment, others firmly attached the livelihood of their corporations to dollars derived from open enrollment transfers. For example, one superintendent wrote, “Our out of district enrollment is now 40% of the student population and the additional revenue has enabled our corporation to grow programs and add teachers.” Another provided even greater detail. He wrote:

“Without the transfer-tuition population in our school district, we would have one-third less funds and be forced to reduce staff, programs, and perhaps not even be in existence due to our circuit breaker loss. Tax cap limits and a drop in our assessed value from \$520 million in 2008 to \$360 million in 2010, and Tax Increment Finance districts have played a role in our lower assessed valuation. The decision to open enrollment in our district was primarily based on the changes in state funding. Thus curriculum, new programs, and facility enhancements were actually the means to financial survival.”

Just as the competition for funds has impacted the financial realities of districts, so too has it driven relationships between corporations in some instances. One participant shared the following:

“One neighboring community is so focused on recruiting our students that they put out false information regarding the accountability grades of one of our schools. They noted that one of our A schools received a D. A local parochial school uses code words in marketing to promote their ‘safe’ environment versus ours and only depicts non-minority students in ads. I mention these to highlight that districts often use negative and unethical practices because the stakes – getting an additional \$6,000 per students – are substantial in a time when school funding is minimal.”

Indeed, the impact that competitive forces have had on relationships between communities and colleagues was on the minds of several of the study’s participants. One shared that “pitting one school and its respective communities against other communities in a destructive manner. I am quite troubled by what this means for our society as a whole.” A second said, “This is not a good situation for rural public schools. It can be very detrimental to building relationships with neighboring communities.” And yet a third, taking a different track, asserted “Open enrollment is

a competition for students. I don't want to share our secrets. Why would we want to help others take away our kids?"

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

As a teacher I often encountered a common question: “*So what?*” Variations on it were posed by students seeking justification as to why what they read or were asked to do mattered. I posed it to kids with some regularity as I sought to help them make sense of ideas or to clearly communicate purpose in their writing. Regardless of the context or source, the “*So what?*” question was invariably about one thing: meaning-making. It was an attempt to help articulate something’s purpose or value and understand how that new information changed perception or experience. It was often hard to articulate. That certainly holds true for research studies such as this. After establishing a foundation, consulting experts, designing a study method, and gathering and sharing results, the researcher still has to answer “*So what?*” The direction of the question is often filtered through not one but three questions: What was found, why does it matter, and where does it lead us? Those are questions that these pages attempt to answer.

The chapter that follows presents the findings of this study on the contours of Indiana’s interdistrict open enrollment program. It begins with a summary of the research, both how it was conducted and what it found, before examining key takeaways from each of the three research questions individually and as a whole. Then it moves through the study’s implications, highlighting what this research might mean for schools and school leaders. Next, the chapter suggests five avenues for future research that can build upon the foundation established by this work. Finally, the study will wrap-up with a series of concluding thoughts on school choice, competition, and leadership.

Research Summary

Indiana has for several years employed an interdistrict open enrollment program that allows students to attend a public school outside of their local school corporation so long as the receiving school accepts out-of-district transfers. That program remained largely unexplored prior to this study, with no available data on the way in which the program impacted management decisions at the district level or on the attendant outcomes for students and schools. In the absence of such information, this study sought to answer the following three questions:

1. What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?
2. Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation they lead?
3. Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?

The first two questions were designed to give shape to the program's practice in advance of later studies on the program's outcomes. The third question was designed to assess whether or not the potential for increased enrollment competition among public schools was being met with a tested market-oriented management approach.

To answer these questions, a survey was developed that assessed district-level leaders' perceptions of school choice broadly and of their corporation's engagement with Indiana's interdistrict open enrollment program specifically. Central to the study were a series of questions related to the ways in which the school corporations acted to maintain or increase student enrollment. Respondents could indicate the application of forty distinct practices across seven conceptual strands (i.e. policy changes, student activities, curriculum and instruction, partnerships, communications practices, communications content, and human capital). Data was

disaggregated into frequency tables by conceptual strand, open-enrollment participation, and corporation setting. 163 respondents representing 135 school corporations, or 47% of Indiana districts, took part in the survey. Of those respondents, 84.6% participated in the state's interdistrict open enrollment program, and 56.5% identified other traditional public school districts as their primary enrollment competitors.

Among representatives from open enrollment participating districts, nine distinct actions were undertaken by more than 50% of the respondents. They included the following: undertaking website updates (93 of 135, 68.9%); increasing the district's presence on social media (91 of 135, 67.4%); emphasizing student and staff achievements in communications (88 of 135, 65.2%); increasing access to and use of instructional technology (85 of 137, 62%); emphasizing available resources in communications (79 of 135, 58.5%); emphasizing particular themes in communications (78 of 135, 57.8%); emphasizing accountability metrics in communications (75 of 135, 55.6%); increasing access to or availability of Advanced Placement and dual-credit courses (76 of 137, 55.5%); and advertising (73 of 137, 52.6%). Seven of the nine actions were linked to communications practices or content.

The study revealed that interdistrict open enrollment participants and non-participants employed different patterns of enrollment-related practices. While open enrollment participants favored communication-focused actions, non-participant respondents pursued actions across a broader set of conceptual strands. Similarly, discernible differences in approach were noted among open enrollment districts located in cities, towns, suburbs, and rural areas. While the town-based sample size was too small to draw any significant conclusions, it was evident that city-based and rural districts undertook more actions with greater collective frequency than their suburban-based peers.

Lastly, the study revealed that 23.2% of the open enrollment sample and 19.6% of total respondents approached the issue of maintaining or increasing student enrollment with a practice that mirrored the strategic management framework. The framework employs five stages – objective articulation, capabilities analysis, resource alignment, practice implementation, and programmatic evaluation – oriented towards helping organizations develop capabilities and respond to changing environments. As reported, 32 respondents provided data that would indicate their corporations undertook steps in each of the five stages. The greatest barriers to applying the strategic management framework came from districts failing to articulate maintaining or increasing enrollment as a mission-linked strategic objective or to align existing resources towards that end.

Research Question One

Research question one asked, *What are Indiana superintendents saying that they are doing in response to interdistrict open enrollment?* The study found that school corporation leaders utilized a variety of actions to maintain or increase enrollment, but that a majority of those actions were linked to communications practices. Corporations focused on developing a message that highlighted thematic concepts, indicators of school quality, achievement, and available resources. Such messages were conveyed through attention to district websites, social media platforms, and advertising. The only major structural or capital changes made were linked to increasing access to and use of instructional technology and increasing the availability of advanced coursework at the high school level. These two actions are substantial, to be sure, but can also be linked to a variety of external forces, like evolving pedagogical methods, movements by textbook publishers to create digital content, and a continued national emphasis on college

readiness. Though the actions might have been undertaken with an eye towards student enrollment, they were likely to happen regardless of the presence of market-based forces.

It was theorized nearly thirty years ago that increased market competition among schools might not result in wholesale changes or adjustments to consumer preferences (Hanson, 1992; Tweedie & Riley, 1990). That appears to have been the case with Indiana's foray into public school competition. School corporations have opted to avoid costly interventions and reforms in favor of being more intentional about telling the public who they are and what they do. Doing so might be a recognition that people chose schools for environmental, relational, or convenience factors (Daring, 2005; Davies & Quirke, 2005; Hirsch, 1995). It could also be a nod to the fact that most people already believe their present schools to be of sufficient quality and are unlikely to select an alternative (PDK/Gallup, 2014); intentional, positive public communication simply reinforces that perception. Finally, it might be a byproduct of convenience paired with financial reality. In a state where education dollars are hard to come by, improving or expanding communications practices as opposed to undertaking major capital or instructional changes might be the more cost-effective method for indicating quality or differentiating one school or corporation from another. Whatever the logic, Indiana schools appear to be approaching public school competition as a problem of information asymmetry. They are being intentional about the public narrative about their schools and seeking to shape public perception. The more people know about our good work, they seem to say, the more they learn about us, the more likely students will stay with – or be drawn to – our schools.

Relatedly, it should be noted that a principal focus on communications methods could be indicative of – or a precursor to – schools targeting specific student populations for movement under the open enrollment option. The concept of pursuing a niche market is common in

competitive environments, and the idea that schools in a free-market system would attempt to enhance their institutional reputation and competitiveness by attracting desirable students for enrollment has been discussed for over two decades (Yair, 1996). Though this particular study did not explore who was moving among Indiana's public schools, past research has already established that it's not uncommon for schools to prefer marketing endeavors to attract students over more costly structural or curricular interventions (Lubienski, 2005). Schools have been found to target markets or market segments (Hanson, 1992) and direct their communications towards niche markets comprised of preferred clientele (Levin & Belfield, 2003; Lubienski, Gulosino, & Weitzel, 2009). Charter schools have been found to focus on recruiting elite students (Lacireno-Paquet et al, 2002), and there is evidence that the same could be true for open enrollment programs in Minnesota (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011) and Michigan (Arsen, Plank, & Sykes, 2001; Lee, Croninger, & Smith, 1994). When looking for students to recruit, schools might seek out kids who fit a set of preferred criteria, like academic performance or extra-curricular involvement, or come from a desirable community. The appeal to do so makes sense from a competitive standpoint. A school or school district's ability to portray themselves as a choice option is dependent in part on the success of their students. If high-quality, high-performing students are enrolling, it's logical to assume that external indicators (like test scores, graduation rates, or extra-curricular honors) will also be strong.

Market positioning notwithstanding, what works from a competitive orientation might not work from an equity outlook. The students whom choice proponents traditionally claim best benefit from increased school options – those coming from communities that are poor, marginalized, or oppressed – are likely to be left behind if the messages coming from the receiving school are designed for people other than them. It's worth remembering that the most

recent changes to Indiana’s open enrollment laws, those that tightened the reasons for denying a student access to open enrollment districts, were spurred by accusations that corporations were “cherry picking” the most capable students for enrollment. Again, this study did not explore who was moving from one district to another, but given the way population targeting has played out in other choice settings and Indiana’s own alleged history of exclusionary enrollment practices, scrutinizing the nature and intent of competition-driven communications practices is prudent. If schools are relying upon communications methods and content as their primary means of maintaining or increasing enrollment, it’s only logical to question to whom those communications are directed and to what end.

Finally, it should be noted that the development of a communications-heavy response to market conditions is a common approach employed by not-for-profit entities seeking to strategically engage with their communities. This concept will be discussed in greater detail through the findings to Research Question Three presented below.

Research Question Two

The study’s second research question asked, *Is there any correlation between superintendent response and the setting of the corporation that they lead?* That is, does where a corporation is situated, be it in a rural area or suburb or an urban cluster, change how superintendents respond to increased enrollment competition among public school corporations? As previously noted, the answer to this question is somewhat mixed. The study’s structure made a strictly statistical finding impossible; the sample sizes for different NCES-derived settings (i.e. city, town, rural, and suburban) were too small for standard mathematical analysis. Even from a descriptive standpoint, reviewing data on all four settings in a meaningful manner was limited, as too few town-based respondents participated in the survey. Discernible differences could be

noted, though, for the remaining three settings. Leaders in rural, suburban, and town-based districts favor different actions when attempting to maintain or increase their enrollment.

Suburban districts demonstrated the least level of differentiation among similarly situated respondents. These participants indicated undertaking only three actions – creating or enhancing social media presence (61.5%), updating or improving their website (53.9%), and emphasizing particular themes in communications (53.9%) – at a rate above 50%. Suburban leaders were evenly split on the survey’s remaining most commonly reported actions with the exception of highlighting accountability metrics in communications, for which there was a slight disinclination to do so (46.2%). In contrast, both rural and city-based respondents indicated pursuing each of the nine most commonly reported actions at rates in excess of 55% of their respective sub-samples. Responses from rural-based leaders most closely mirrored the study’s overall ordering of commonly employed practices, no doubt because the number of responses from this setting far exceeded those from other district types. That said, it’s clear that rural districts are often pursuing multiple means of maintaining or increasing student enrollment in contrast with the limited actions undertaken by suburban-based corporations. It is unclear whether employing multiple actions is the result of greater levels of public school competition, fears of declining rural enrollment, or some other unknown factor.

More striking, though, is the information linked to city-based school districts. As highlighted in the previous chapter, there are nine such situated corporations in Indiana and seven, or 77.8% of the group, were represented in this study. Those seven respondents had a high level of congruency among their practices. 100% updated their websites and engaged with social media. 85.7% increased access to instructional technology and advanced coursework while also advertising their schools. 71.4% emphasized accomplishments, available resources, and thematic

elements in public communications. 57.1% chose to highlight test scores, graduation rates, and state letter grades when communicating with the public. Some of these actions could be the result of city-based schools having larger staffs that they can direct towards undertaking market-oriented actions, but the consistency among respondents would seem to indicate that more is at work than simply aligning resources across similarly-situated corporations. Just as rural leaders indicated a willingness to engage with multiple practices to stabilize or grow enrollment, so too did leaders of city corporations but at an even higher rate for the sub-sample.

Taking this information collectively, we see that the way in which corporations address enrollment competition is different based on corporation settings. But how do we make sense of those differences? Turning first to suburban districts, two points from previous literature stand out. First, Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1994) found suburban-based corporations in Michigan resisted efforts to implement interdistrict open enrollment programs in their state out of fear of receiving transfers who were culturally different than their own students. Such corporations are likely to abut urban and rural districts with dissimilar student populations; maintaining closed borders could be a mechanism for controlling district demographics. Making such a determination in regards to Indiana school corporations is beyond the scope of this study, but it is possible that a similar mindset could be at play in regards to the state's suburban schools. Second, Hanson (1992) said that existing diversity in schooling options would insulate individual entities from having to adjust practices to market demands while simultaneously noting that families often indicated school preference by merit of where they chose to live. Looking at suburban districts, their schools are located in areas with a variety of educational options, their structure and educational approach are often similar to neighboring suburban districts, and families chose to engage with their schools by merit of living in the particular suburb. Applying

these traits to Indiana's suburban corporations, it's possible that Hanson's insulation theory could be at play and limit the need to engage in major initiatives linked to enrollment competition. Taken together, both findings could explain the data connected to Indiana's suburban districts and why they undertook so few actions to engage with open enrollment and maintain or increase enrollment.

This study made no assumptions about school corporation quality, so no data was collected on performance indicators or public perceptions of quality that could be linked to individual practices. However, quality is one of many factors that influence where families opt to educate their kids. Rural districts, by merit of their location and composition, often lack the high level of alternative K-12 options found in more populated areas but could benefit from the fact that families often select schools based on environmental factors (Davies & Quirke, 2005; Hirsch, 1995) or convenience (Daring, 2005). Their demonstrated preference for highlighting environmental or communal factors in public communications could be linked to these points. It's also possible that, being in a setting with declining enrollment and increasing financial pressure (Balonon-Rosen, 2016; McInerney, 2017), their pursuit of multiple lower-cost actions is an attempt to draw from a limited enrollment pool as a means of keeping their corporations stable.

City school corporations remain the enigma. Even with such a small sub-sample size, why would such a large percentage of city-based corporations engage with this study? What would cause so many similarly-situated districts to undertake a multiplicity of actions designed to maintain or increase enrollment? Given that this study did not collect data on the environmental specifics attached to the setting sub-samples or to individual corporations, all that can be offered is conjecture. City schools are likely to be located in areas that also contain rural

and parochial schools, each offering a unique experience for students while increasing the level of enrollment competition for that particular context. The presence of an extensive private school voucher program in the state makes families' access to parochial schools more feasible than would have been historically possible. In contrast with urban or suburban settings, where a large concentration of students exists from which new enrollments might be drawn, the settings for city corporations might have a more limited student population from which transfers could be gained or lost. The smaller pool of potential students would exacerbate the impact of individual student mobility. A host of other factors, from demographics to student performance indicators to general public perception, could also be at play when families consider where to send their kids to school. Financial considerations, such as capital needs or local funding levels, might also be a factor in leading city-based corporations to employ so many methods to maintain or increase enrollment. In short, a multiplicity of conditions is likely to exist when leaders of city corporations formulate plans relative to enrollment competition. As for the similarity of responses among participants from this setting, it is possible that city-based leaders communicate with each other (informally or through study councils and professional organizations) about the challenges they face in their particular context and how they have responded. Doing so might result in a consistent "playbook" for addressing enrollment concerns. Theories aside, the way in which city-based corporations have responded to increased enrollment competition and their reasons for doing so present an opportunity for greater examination.

Stepping back from the individual settings and looking at the findings as a whole, it seems obvious that market conditions and resource availability would differ based on corporation location and context. Larger corporations might have greater flexibility in assigning people or monies towards competitive ends; smaller corporations might have more agility to move quickly

towards a desired end. Factors like these could account for different approaches in different locales. Just as Indiana has rejected a “one-size-fits-all” approach to schooling options for students, so too have dissimilarly situated school corporations sought a differentiated approach to maintaining or increasing student enrollment.

Research Question Three

The study’s third research question asked, *Do these responses bear any resemblance to the practice of strategic management?* The practice of strategic management was designed to provide private sector enterprises with a systematic approach to changing competitive environments, and the field has seen increasing application in the not-for-profit and public sector enterprises over the last few decades. This study sought to see the degree to which the framework had been operationalized by public school corporations facing increased competition from other public school districts. To that end, questions from the study’s survey were grouped into five categories – practices related to objective articulation, capabilities analysis, resource alignment, practice implementation, and programmatic evaluation – and analyzed to determine the degree to which a respondent indicated undertaking an action or actions within each category. The study found that 23.2% of leaders within the open enrollment sample and 19.6% of all respondents undertook actions in all five strategic management categories as a means of maintaining or increasing their enrollment.

Ferlie (1992) pointed out that economic theories would function differently in public sector quasi-markets compared to private sector markets and that application of strategic management principles would thus function differently in those settings, too. As such, some might look at the study’s raw numbers and find it unsurprising that so few of the respondents indicated application of the five stages of strategic management practice. It could be reasoned

that the framework as presented might not have matched the context or needs of public service enterprises. However, the five stages were collectively identifiable in approximately one-fifth of the study's total respondents; their joint application increased to nearly one-quarter of interdistrict open enrollment respondents. These numbers indicate a sizable use of strategic management practice in Indiana's school corporations relative to public school enrollment competition. If Ferlie's hypothesis is true, what might account for the ability to apply the strategic management framework in a K-12 school setting? It is probable that as Indiana's public school system has developed into a market-based system over time the cycle of strategic management practice as presented in this study has been implemented in a nuanced or context-driven way, and that some minor modifications on the part of school leaders could result in greater use of the framework.

To illustrate this point, consider the role that strategic goals played in this study. The single greatest factor that inhibited the application of the strategic management framework was the lack of articulated goals linking school corporations' stated mission and vision with the pursuit of increased enrollment. It could be argued that districts simply pursue other strategic objectives, like academic excellence or operational efficiency, in a manner that would negate the need to highlight enrollment stabilization or growth. This position is plausible based on the number of respondents who, when given the chance to provide an open-ended response, said something to the effect of, "We're not doing these things to increase enrollment; we're doing them because that's what good school corporations do." However, it is possible – perhaps even probable – that the lack of enrollment-based objectives is a derivative of the fact that goals are hard for not-for-profit entities to nail down (Hatten, 1982). This is because they're not strictly profit-driven like private enterprises and often face external pressures (from things like

legislatively directed policy paths or competing constituencies) that make articulating concrete, suitable objectives more difficult. Their focus is rarely single-minded. There's little doubt that good school corporations employ certain practices because they are the types of actions that are good for kids or illustrate responsible stewardship of public resources. That does not mean that those actions aren't simultaneously the result of state policy mandates or the objective reality that funding for initiatives and resources is directly correlated to the number of students enrolled.

In a state where corporations' fiscal resources were reduced by a quarter-billion dollars due to property tax caps and are currently tethered to enrollment counts at approximately \$6,500 per enrolled student, it is hard to divorce idealistic objectives from reality-driven goals. For example, it might sound nice to say that the corporation's goal is to develop global citizens ready to face the challenges of an unknown world, but it is impossible to undertake the initiative without the presence of a critical mass of students and the attendant per pupil funding that makes the goal's attainment possible. Indeed, given that a plurality of respondents indicated that school choice has a discernible impact on their corporations and that a majority of those respondents indicated other public schools as their primary enrollment competitor, the specter of market-based realities is likely present in corporations' strategic objectives even if it remains publicly unnamed.

Leaders in many of Indiana's school corporations indicated undertaking actions from within the remaining stages of the strategic management framework. This was true among respondents identified as participants and non-participants in the interdistrict open enrollment program. Yet in the absence of a clearly articulated goal orientation towards enrollment concerns, the possibility exists that these other steps might be a collection of isolated or loosely-linked responses to increased market pressure as opposed to a specific, articulated strategy. Such

an interpretation is supported by Ring and Perry's (1985) assertion that public-sector managers give "attention to emergent rather than intended strategies" because of factors like policy ambiguity, balancing competing interest groups, and artificial time constraints (p. 283).

Logically, it is feasible that actions were undertaken out of real or perceived necessity rather than as a means of meeting strategic objectives, as doing so would fit with the historical narrative that nonprofit strategy was most often ad hoc or crisis oriented (Hatten, 1982).

The preceding points notwithstanding, the responses reported in this study illustrated that district-level leaders consistently engaged with public school enrollment competition via communications-based strategies. Other approaches were available, like undertaking capital projects or building collaborative efforts with external groups, but Indiana's school leaders most often chose to direct their attention towards what they were saying about their schools and how that information was shared. Schools were already in the habit of communicating with the public; board meetings were open to visitors, newsletters were mailed home, and newspaper articles were solicited. That pre-existing communicative practice appears to have been bolstered or modified as a means of influencing enrollment. This aligns with Hatten's (1982) belief that nonprofit organizations often employ strategic management principles by channeling existing functional practices into a definable proactive goal orientation, and that a primary method of doing so revolves around the use of sophisticated marketing techniques to convey community relevance.

Considering the preceding information, it appears that some Indiana school corporations are employing a strategic management practice that mirrors market-linked approaches found in other sectors. It is possible that more corporations could be said to do the same if a clear approach to goal articulation could be found, though the multiplicity of reported actions linked to

enrollment growth or maintenance might indicate that this hurdle is more cosmetic than concrete. Moreover, two questions still remain for another study to answer. First, even if a corporation is found to have undertaken actions in each of the five strategic management stages, was doing so the result of intentional strategy or a byproduct of responses to external forces? Second, if the practice is widespread, is there a discernible difference in results (that is, enrollment count) based off of applying the framework?

The Study as a Whole

To this point in the chapter, discussion has focused on each of the three research questions as discrete areas of inquiry. In truth, though, the questions are strands of one concept, one study. They are also tethered to the practices of a distinct set of individuals, school superintendents, and the ways in which they lead. What is left to make sense of this study, then, is to more clearly connect the strands to the leaders.

At their core, school choice programs are built on two distinct philosophical strands. Foundational literature from the movement, such as that produced by Friedman (2002), emphasized the belief that increasing the variety and number of schools available to families would result in heightened market-based pressures that led to improved outcomes for kids and communities. If more educational options existed, only the strongest choices – those that met families’ needs, that gained results, or that efficiently used resources – would be able to operate, as weaker schools would be forced to close due to student attrition. Later literature strands, though, moved away from framing choice in market terms and favored the notion that school choice was really about empowering families to make decisions that were in their best interests. Work by Viteritti, Walberg, and Wolf (2005) among others traced the movement of school choice legislation away from economics and towards opportunities. Choice advocates and state

legislatures pitched charter schools, voucher programs, and even public school open enrollment options as a means of providing individuals with a greater level of autonomy in selecting educational options. Zip codes and socio-economic levels were no longer to be the determinants of what educational options were available to children. Parents, not the state, knew how best to meet the needs of their kids.

Though Indiana's open enrollment law is written in a philosophically neutral manner relative to the two conceptual strands mentioned above, the limited reporting available on the program's origins and expansion indicate that the program was put forth as one meant to foster increased opportunity. Indiana University's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) issued an open enrollment policy brief that found the state's earliest iteration of the practice was designed to provide greater opportunities for students enrolled in failing urban schools to attend a school wherein they might find greater academic success (Herrmann, Burroughs, & Plucker, 2009). Programmatic expansion state-wide occurred after the implementation of policies linked to the federal No Child Left Behind law, which mandated that students attending chronically underperforming schools be permitted the option of attending a school of their choice that was making adequate yearly progress in regards to student performance. The current version of the law, which enables state-wide voluntary transfer of kids among any school corporation open to receiving out-of-district students, highlights the ability of families' to make enrollment choices based on their perception that a school is able to accommodate their child's needs (Herrmann, Burroughs, & Plucker, 2009, p. 5; Indiana Code 20-26-11). Absent from these findings is any articulation that the state's open enrollment policy was linked to market-based theories and school competition.

That said, it is not possible to divorce open enrollment's present framing from its past foundation. Market-based propositions and parental choice rhetoric are historically entwined. They are two sides of the same coin. Indiana has framed its open enrollment policy as one of choice, not competition. It has been designed to be about individual decisions, not school or community actions. Yet this is a distinction that is directed towards those who make the choice, chiefly families as consumers, as opposed to those that are left to provide the consumer with a choice option, namely school corporations. It is not uncommon for people with different roles in a transaction to view a shared experience dissimilarly, and that is the case in this instance. Though the state legislature appears to have intended the open enrollment policy to be a means of providing families with public school options, Indiana school corporation leaders across the state have had to view the practice as one of market-based competition.

Competition is confined to those who share a market position (Yair, 1996), which accounts in part for the variability with which Indiana superintendents from different corporation settings have opted to engage with interdistrict open enrollment. Recall that the program is not mandatory; schools must opt into participating. Well-positioned districts, those that are growing or are financially stable, can choose to not engage. Corporations that are struggling or in some way challenged are likely to go all in as a means of stabilizing their positions. Currey (1992) found Washington state superintendents were more likely to engage in the practice if they led districts with larger percentages of dropouts, and the impact of similar circumstances could be at play in Indiana districts, too. Corporations that fall between the two camps get pulled along by the increased efforts of those who feel forced to participate, as was demonstrated by May (2007) in regards to Ohio superintendents participating in a similar program because of the proliferation of available choices for students. This creates two problems.

First, student options are considerably hampered if some of the strongest or most stable corporations do not participate. Kids enrolled in the state's struggling or underperforming districts might be able to "trade up" to a better corporation if such an option is available (and that's a big if given that superintendent comments revealed some districts have intentionally closed themselves off from the state's neediest students). Only recently have some Indiana researchers begun to assert this to be the case, using rudimentary data to claim that there are clear patterns of open enrollment movement towards higher quality corporations (Hicks, 2018); this fits with what was observed in Michigan's implementation of a similar policy (Arsen, Plank & Sykes, 2001). Many students, though, are likely to be left with choices that are either similar to or less favorable than their current position. Absent a clear quality differential or unique environment, it is probable that such movement would be driven by nebulous perceptions of distinction. Moreover, the similarities of competing corporations increases the odds that their ability to undertake actions meant to induce out-of-district enrollment will be built off of a shared set of circumstances. They would essentially be using a set of similarly situated factors relative to environment, funding, and resources to attract a finite number of students. The distinction among options would then be derived either through how those factors were packaged for public review or how resources were adjusted to create a uniquely compelling option not available elsewhere.

Second, the points highlighted in the first problem lead us to a reality of the market environment: attention and resources have to be directed towards improving market position. This is a moot point for corporations that do not need to participate in open enrollment. They can keep doing what they have been doing all along. There's no change in their attention to teaching, learning, and community building. However, those that are part of the market by choice or

circumstance have to find a means of engagement. That engagement comes at a cost of focus, resources, or both. Though superintendents often find their attention split among multiple aspects of their practice, like governance and instruction (Hoyle, 1999), having to engage with competitive forces means that attention must be taken from those other areas and put towards competition. It also requires that already limited resources – be they time, money, or personnel – be reallocated to competitive ends. It's a big task for a corporation on sure footing; it can become an even greater undertaking for leaders already juggling major items of corporation concern. That is, it's one thing to attempt to strengthen academic outcomes, increase opportunities for students, and shore up community relations. It's quite another to do all those things while fending off enrollment challenges from your neighbors and finding ways to convince families to choose you over your competitors. And though this study revealed school corporation leaders are being responsive to market pressures from their peers, what we know of how superintendents approach their work and how they've approached this particular situation raises the question of whether or not they are well-positioned to competitively engage with not only other public school corporations but the totality of choice options as a whole.

Research has demonstrated that one of the primary reasons superintendents undertake any action is to reduce uncertainty (Wills & Peterson, 1992). Communities favor stability in their institutions, and few things can raise the ire of a constituency like an unsteady school system. Unfortunately, Indiana's approach to school funding and the proliferation of school choice options (which has made it difficult to accurately forecast student enrollment trends) has created an uncertain environment for many school corporations. Neither students nor dollars are guaranteed from year to year. This leaves district leaders the choice of either continuing along with business as usual, managing their corporations as they have in decades past, or seeking a

new approach to their practice. Similar uncertainty was faced by other public sector enterprises, like health care and transportation, when market forces were introduced into their sectors, and practitioners in those fields often turned strategic management as a means to systematically engage with emerging competitive conditions (Ferlie, 1992). That's because the practice of strategic management is designed to help entities adapt to changing environments and reduce uncertainty by aligning efforts with carefully selected strategic goals. It was previously hypothesized that schools could use strategic management towards similar ends (Fidler, 1998), and the findings of this study show us that some superintendents, by intention or accident, are using a process similar to strategic management to face competitive uncertainty introduced by emerging school markets. Yet for every Indiana school leader employing the practice, there are three more who are not. And for those who are using it – or might wish to use it – to strengthen their corporation's standing or more competitively position their districts in the face of market pressures, there are clear impediments to effective implementation.

So, what is the primary roadblock to strategic management application in this instance? As noted before, it is a lack of articulated goals that orient school corporations as market-based entities. Truthfully, the absence of competition-aligned or enrollment-focused goals isn't overly surprising. The literature on public sector strategic management use highlights that implementation of the practice is often inhibited by a lack of goal clarity (Hatten, 1982; Ring & Perry, 1985). The same has been found for superintendent use of the related strategic planning process; goal clarity and the attendant development of a systemic approach to planning, implementation, and evaluation were found to be critical to the processes' usefulness (Valentine, 1988). Moving superintendents from strategic planning to strategic management is possible but

likely to be bound by their ability to both define a strategic objective and then systemically align their corporation's structure and resources to that end.

It is worth noting, as was done earlier in the chapter, that the absence of an enrollment-linked goal does not indicate that school corporations lack goals altogether. In fact, it is likely that they have clearly stated goals related to student achievement or fiscal management or college and career readiness. Those objectives serve to direct their work and resources. They are probably similar to the goals of their neighboring districts, and they are also likely similar to the goals their corporations have had in decades past that have done little to either stem the tide of increased enrollment competition or reduce present levels of market uncertainty. Indiana school leaders have been reticent to view their work in economic terms, pushing back on the concept of schooling-as-business and seeking to focus on a publicly palatable concept of doing “what’s good for kids” without acknowledging market realities. But if you were to go to any Indiana school district, places that are both growing and losing enrollment, you would find leaders who earnestly believe that their approach to teaching and learning is good for kids and that their efforts should be good enough to retain or attract students. Clearly, though, that is not the case in all environments.

What is a district to do? As noted before, the stable or growing corporations need not do anything. Their circumstances are such that they can continue their current approach with little worry as to their long-term viability. Corporations that are facing enrollment pressure, though, should consider reorienting their strategic objectives. Structuring a goal around maintaining current enrollment levels or even growing at a set count or percentage annually directly tethers the corporation's actions to a student population that makes positive outcomes possible. In doing so, the corporation explicitly acknowledges that their ability to meet student needs is correlated

to the health of their enrollment. This then allows them to filter actions relative to things like student achievement, fiscal management, and college and career readiness through the lens of what is needed to maintain a sustainable practice. Available resources and district initiatives can then be structured so as to facilitate meeting the objective. The goal could be reassessed once the corporation has achieved a more stable competitive position, and a decision could be made to either maintain it or reorient their focus once again.

Many, if not most, district leaders would find this proposal to be bold or maybe even misdirected. It may be. It is evident, though, that business as usual in relation to how schools approach competition has only benefited a select few districts in Indiana. Market-based reforms are in place, for good or bad, and corporations need to acknowledge this fact and adapt their outlook so as to continue to be around as a viable option for students.

Even if the challenge of goal articulation were surpassed, making the move towards implementing a strategic management practice in a K-12 setting is a likely to be a rocky transition for many corporations. Superintendents have been found to act on limited or varied patterns of information (Lasher, 1990), and this study revealed existing but limited practices linked to programmatic evaluation, analysis, and patterns of information gathering oriented towards issues associated with enrollment and student mobility. District leaders and school boards seeking an improved market position would need to be able to identify what types of information would be most useful to know in their given setting and what methods would be best for obtaining that information before operationalizing a practice to that end. The system would need to be robust so as to lessen the likelihood that decisions are made on limited or incomplete information. Only after this system was established could the corporation develop and implement plans designed to support their strategic objectives.

Relatedly, research has shown that superintendents facing uncertainty often prefer to move forward with small adjustments over big changes (Lasher, 1990). This approach makes sense if they are faced with unclear goals or are acting on partial or limited information. It is also a reasonable approach when there are concerns about market instability or the effectiveness of certain interventions to increase the probability of achieving stated objectives. Not surprisingly, existing literature and this study's findings are in alignment on this point. Indiana's district-level leaders approached enrollment competition from other public school corporations by sidestepping major changes in practice in favor of smaller, more easily manageable communications-based strategies. However, the uniformity of this approach raises a question about its efficacy. If corporations engaging in competition for student enrollment are all employing the same strategy, albeit in contextualized or nuanced ways, what is the probability that they are able to stand-out from the crowd as the best option for students? Districts are likely to increase the effectiveness of their efforts if they are able to use data to match their practices with public preferences or if they are able to structure a communications program that matches best-practice for the field. At the same time, the commonality of the approach might provide a window for enterprising districts to undertake a larger, more distinct initiative that causes them to stand out from the crowd. Doing so carries an inherent risk, as do all substantial actions. There is no guarantee that a major initiative will be well-received in the short-term or pay off in the long-term. But risk can be mitigated by research, planning, and careful execution. Ultimately, school boards and district leaders looking to go that route would have to assess their needs and the level of risk that their constituents are willing to shoulder before developing a plan to move forward.

Still, a third path forward can be found in this study's results. In conducting a state-wide survey of superintendent practice in relation to interdistrict open enrollment, the empirical data highlighted herein can function as a playbook for how corporations can approach the subject. Districts could review their own efforts and those of surrounding open enrollment corporations, compare them against the findings for their setting or the state as a whole, and determine if there are areas in which their approach could be strengthened or expanded. It is possible that the data could reveal that a given district is not employing a common practice; it is also possible that gaps in the efforts of competing districts could be identified and accounted for when developing a strategic plan. At the very least, the information contained within this study could serve as a reference point about the state of public school market competition. The better leaders understand how things presently stand, the better they are able to make decisions that benefit their communities and schools.

Lastly, McDonald (2014) found that school reform movements have resulted in a disruption of the relationship between schools and their communities, leading to uncertainty on the part of both families and educators about things like the purpose of education, what makes for a good school, and what the social contract should look like between schools and the people and places they serve. Superintendents most often respond to this disruption by attempting to control the public narrative about their schools (indeed, this may be a factor in why so many superintendents respond to competition with communications strategies). As was noted above, superintendent actions are often aligned with attempts to reduce uncertainty, but so far those actions have failed to stem the tide of school reform efforts connected to choice initiatives. To that end, it might be prudent for school leaders to backwards map their responses to public school competition. Success of initiatives is linked to goal clarity. Such clarity might be achieved

if leaders can deconstruct the steps from their present reality to the responses that spawned the present reality, to the goals that led to the responses, to the uncertainty that they attempted to mitigate via the development of the goals, to the disruption from which the uncertainty sprang. The better leaders understand the origins of public school competition in their own setting and the degree to which their actions are aligned or misaligned to address those origins, the better equipped they will be to structure their corporations in a fashion that meets the needs of the people they serve.

Implications

Stepping back from the findings of this study, it is prudent to ask, does any of this information matter? In fact, one of the survey respondents shared similar thoughts when he wrote the following:

I find it perplexing that we spend so much time, energy, attention, and focus on “choice” and competition between schools and school districts as if it will make any difference in the lives of students generally... It is super frustrating that we operate in a state that seems completely infatuated with strategies that have no evidence of working. If the goal of your survey is to shed some light on that, good. If not, I would ask, does contributing to this noise do more harm than good as it pertains to the students in Indiana?

Given that this research wasn’t conducted with the intent of communicating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a particular choice strategy, it is likely that the respondent quoted above would find the study’s findings of little use. Yet responses like that are emblematic of how many approach school choice research; they begin with a conclusion and seek supporting evidence. That is not how this study was structured. Rather, it started with an objective fact, that Indiana permits the practice of interdistrict open enrollment, and sought to determine the shape and character of that fact on the ground level. It revealed the following points in doing so.

1. Actions Without Analysis: This study demonstrated that Indiana's district-level leaders are undertaking actions in response to the state's interdistrict open enrollment policy. In doing so, the absence of any exploration of the program's effects by the state or researchers has become all the more glaring.
2. Open Enrollment as Reform Mechanism: This study found that the most common actions undertaken by corporations in response to open enrollment are those that focus on communications methods and content. If districts are simply changing communications practices, the desired reforms that market-based competition are meant to engender – improved equity, improved outcomes, and improved fiscal prudence – are unlikely to be realized.
3. Audiences: Demonstrated targeting of niche markets has occurred in other choice settings, and it is plausible that Indiana school corporations' communications-heavy response to interdistrict open-enrollment program could function as a means of recruiting preferred student types to the exclusion of others. After all, communications-driven approaches to enrollment growth are likely to be audience-focused. Decisions are made about what is presented and how it is packaged based on who is meant to be reached. This raises concerns about the ability of the program to promote an equity of opportunity for all students as well as raises questions about the cost to districts that lose these preferred students.
4. Collegiality: A majority of Indiana's traditional public school leaders are from districts that participate in the state's open enrollment programs, and a majority of the study's respondents identified other public schools as their primary source of enrollment competition. These corporations are, to varying degrees, engaging in active competition

with each other. This raises the question of how these disparate entities with potentially competing strategic objectives can continue to work together on areas of shared concern without risk to their own interests.

5. Strategy and Management: A majority of districts that actively participate in the open enrollment program simultaneously fail to articulate enrollment growth as a strategic objective. A majority of districts that undertake actions designed to maintain or increase enrollment do so without attending to other areas, like resource alignment or evaluation of the actions' impact. This indicates that the practice of strategy development and implementation might be an area of growth for district-level leaders. It is probable that corporations could experience better results in regards to maintaining or increasing enrollment through an approach framed by the principles of strategic management.

Stepping beyond these points, this research provides clear practical application for a number of constituencies. First, Indiana's school corporation leaders and school boards can use the information to understand how districts across the state have responded to increased enrollment competition from their peers. It is information that can be used to guide their own actions in relation to the student enrollment market or as a means of better informing their communities of how school choice and competition are directing the work of schools. Second, legislators and policy makers can look at the information as one more collection of data that can inform their understanding of how market-based reforms have impacted the state's public schools. They can compare the intended effects of such reforms with the practiced reality of their implementation, and from that comparison they might be able to make better informed decisions about how best to direct state education policy. Third, other states with open enrollment programs, like Minnesota and Michigan, can look at this study's

findings and see whether or not it would be prudent to explore how ground-level actions associated with the policy's implementation had an effect on the efficacy of their own programs. Fourth, and finally, graduate programs in educational leadership looking to provide relevant and practical training for district-level leaders can look to what superintendents have reported as actions they have undertaken in response to market competition, compare that to the training they provide for such leaders, and determine whether or not it would be wise to include professional training or development on how to develop plans not only to effectively lead a school corporation but to do so in a competitive market-based environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed to discern the contours of Indiana's interdistrict open enrollment program for public schools. It provided a review of the actions district-level leaders have taken in response to the program's potential for increasing enrollment competition among public school corporations, determined that differences existed in practice among corporation settings, and confirmed that some corporations are approaching the program with an approach that mirrors the strategic management framework. And yet for all its findings, the study was but a first pass over a deeply complex issue. Much is left to be learned about Indiana's interdistrict open enrollment program and, based on the study's findings, it would be prudent to consider the following strands as opportunities for future research.

1. Effects of Open Enrollment: Knowing the contours of the interdistrict open enrollment program's implementation at the district level, it would be worthwhile to know if the program has resulted in any of the promised effects of school choice mechanisms, like

improved academic outcomes, more equitable access to quality learning environments, or schools and corporations that are more responsive to family needs.

2. Contextualized Examples: Approaches to school choice are often driven by the particulars of local context. Having gained a rudimentary understanding of the overall programmatic shape of open enrollment in Indiana, the field could benefit from a deeper, nuanced review of the practice in specific settings.
3. City-Based Corporations: The high response rate of city-based leaders and the high number and collective frequency of actions undertaken by those leaders indicates that these districts are experiencing open enrollment (and perhaps other forms of choice) differently than their counterparts in other settings. It would be prudent to explore this particular setting in greater depth.
4. Communications Practices: The study revealed an affinity for changing communication practices and for including certain types of content. An additional study of the strand, including what those communications look like and to whom they are directed, would help determine the degree to which niche constituencies are being targeted as a means of maintaining or increasing enrollment. It would also be beneficial to explore the extent to which communications practices and marketing strategies have been aligned.
5. Strategic Management Application in School Corporations: Though approximately one in five district leaders reported an approach to maintaining or increasing enrollment that closely mirrored the strategic management framework, it is unclear whether the framework has been more broadly implemented for other areas of strategic concern, like instructional quality or a changing fiscal landscape, or whether actions undertaken were part of an intentional, coherent strategic plan. Further study could be undertaken to

determine superintendent familiarity with the framework and the ways in which it is (or could be) applied in public school corporations.

6. Linking Practices to Student Movement: Now that Indiana has begun to collect data on which school corporations are gaining or losing students due to the open enrollment policy, it is possible to correlate specific actions undertaken by districts to attract students with levels of student migration. A more sophisticated analysis of enrollment trend data, perhaps through the use of a geographic information system (GIS), coupled with this study's findings could provide a better understanding on a host of issues, from which of the identified practices are most effective at increasing enrollment to which students and districts are benefiting from (or being harmed by) the policy.

Conclusion

As noted in this study's introduction, the impetus for my interest in school choice and its impact on public schools originated from observing the practice of a superintendent who believed that market-based competition had forced his school district to become better as a means of survival. Years of complex local dynamics and abdicating responsibility for educating the community's kids resulted in an existential threat to the school corporation, wherein the only way to staunch enrollment losses to neighboring corporations and maintain the district's financial viability was to become better. Better than they were. Better than the competition. And in academics and outcomes and community engagement that's just what the district became – better. Competition worked as a reform agent for that leader and that corporation.

I witnessed this example unfold in real time as Indiana's legislators and policy makers pushed the state's education system towards ever greater levels of school choice and competition. Each foray into new forms of choice or each expansion of existing programs came

with the same certain assertion: increasing options for students, making districts compete for available kids and funds, would result in better schools. So it was within this context that I began to develop as a school leader and researcher. My interests took shape around one particular iteration of reform policy, the implementation of an interdistrict open enrollment program, and I asked some variations on a simple question: when given the option to compete against other public schools for student enrollment, what steps would a public school superintendent take to maintain or increase the number of kids in his schools? Though it wasn't explicitly stated, I wanted to know whether leaders across the state, like my mentor, had felt compelled by competition's pressure to do things that made them better places for kids and communities. Did they expand course offerings or increase support services? Did they provide more clubs, more sports, more arts programs?

It turns out that when Indiana's school corporations came face to face with competition from neighboring districts they became better, or at least more intentional, at one thing: communicating. Major reforms were bypassed in favor of telling a better story, being better at celebrating teacher and student successes, and being better equipped to spread the word about who they were and what they did. The preceding pages of this study have explored the reasons for this approach, how it's situated in what we know of superintendent practice and how organizations deal with change. They've asserted that school corporations can improve their approach by articulating better goals and implementing a tested management system designed for market-driven uncertainty. Yet here, at the study's conclusion, the findings feel a bit anticlimactic. Was it really worth changing the dynamics of how school corporations engaged with their communities or to potentially imperil the funding they used to provide critical services to kids only to have the end result be that schools got better at communicating?

Education reforms – particularly those associated with school choice – often have grand origins. They are promoted as a means of transforming processes and outcomes. Kids, communities, states – they all become better if things are done differently. Yet time and again the promise and the practice fail to align. What works for some people in some places does not always replicate elsewhere. It's possible, perhaps even likely, that the disconnect between ambitions and outcomes is so acutely felt because we often skip over the middle part of the reforms. That is, theories posit what might lead to better educational outcomes and explorations of choice programs most often focus on the identities of students and their attendant results, but somewhere in between people forget to look at how such initiatives are implemented. That's where this study differed from others. It argued that it was necessary to look at how a program is practiced before trying to make a determination as to its effectiveness. That's because outcomes aren't just predicated on what we do but how we do it. And, taking this study's findings as an example, if public school corporations' primary means of implementing or responding to a major reform initiative is to communicate more clearly and effectively, what could we reasonably expect the total impact of that reform to be?

The answer to the preceding question is presently a moot point. Public school enrollment competition is a reality in Indiana. What remains unanswered, for both school corporation leaders and policy makers, is the degree to which that program should be engaged as a mechanism for change. If the program's aim is to simply provide students and families with choice for choice's sake, then the present expression of the program is acceptable. If the intent was to foster something more substantive, like transformed schools or more engaged communities, then the mechanisms by which the program is operationalized and the outcomes those actions produce deserve greater scrutiny than they have been afforded up to this time. This

study took the first step towards that end, but it's only a start. If we want better schools for Indiana's kids and better outcomes to shape our collective future, we need to better understand the way in which policy becomes practice and practice becomes results.

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APPENDIX A

Practices to Promote Social Exchange

1. Specify how survey results will be used
2. Ask for help or advice that only the respondent can give
3. Ask interesting questions
4. Utilize sponsorship from a legitimate organization
5. Stress that response opportunities are limited

Source: Dillman, Smyth, & Christian. (2014). Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method.

APPENDIX B

Practices to Reduce Participation Costs

1. Reduce the burden of length
2. Reduce complexity
3. Use design and layout to make the survey easier to complete
4. Avoid subordinating language
5. Make response convenient
6. Avoid survey modes that respondents find uncomfortable
7. Recognize offering response mode choices may lower response rates
8. Minimize personal or sensitive information requests
9. Show similarity to completed requests

Source: Dillman, Smyth, & Christian. (2014). Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method.

APPENDIX C

[LETTERHEAD]

[DATE]

[ADDRESS 1]

[ADDRESS 2]

[ADDRESS 3]

[ADDRESS 4]

Dear [NAME],

We hope this letter finds you well. We are writing to ask your help with an important survey of Indiana school corporation leaders being conducted at the I.U. School of Education. Though we know you have many demands on your time, we hope you will offer insight from your experiences as a district leader.

Indiana has enabled **market-based enrollment competition** among public school corporations through the practice of inter-district open enrollment. Past studies of open enrollment in other states have focused on demographic patterns or student outcomes. This study, though, hopes to define actions taken by district leaders to increase or retain student enrollment.

The results of the study will be compiled into a **practice brief on enrollment strategies** that will be distributed to school corporations in 2018 and form the basis of a doctoral dissertation. Though not every corporation accepts out-of-district transfer students, the study is designed to receive feedback from all school corporations. **Your input matters.** The more responses we receive, the better information we will be able to share with you and your colleagues at the study's completion.

A survey link will be sent to your work email on Monday, 16 October. The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. This study is confidential and your participation is voluntary. Individual answers will not reveal your identity or that of your school corporation; you are welcome to skip questions to which you do not want to provide a response. However, once you complete the survey, you will be given the option of providing details for follow-up contact if you feel there is more information for you to share.

We greatly appreciate your help with this study. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the study's coordinator at irwinc@indiana.edu.

Cordially,

Cory Irwin
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership

Dr. Suzanne Eckes
Professor
Educational Leadership

Dr. Walter Bourke
Visiting Assistant Professor
Educational Leadership

Qualtrics Email: 23 October 2017

Dear Colleague:

Recently you received a letter inviting you to participate in a **survey of Indiana school corporation leaders** regarding the practice of inter-district open enrollment. The study is being conducted to determine the extent to which Indiana school corporations are engaging with and responding to **increased enrollment competition among public school corporations**, and your expertise and experience are vital to developing that understanding.

Though not every corporation accepts out-of-district transfer students, the study is designed to receive feedback from all school corporations. **Your input matters.** Information gathered will be used to create a **brief on enrollment practices** distributed to Indiana school corporations and as part of a doctoral dissertation.

Though participation is voluntary, I hope you'll take **ten minutes** to complete the survey. It can be accessed via the links below.

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${l://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

Please feel free to contact me by phone (765-960-9048) or email (irwinc@indiana.edu) if you have any questions or concerns. Thanks for your time and attention to this message. I look forward to sharing our results with you soon.

Cordially,

Cory Irwin
Doctoral Candidate
Indiana University School of Education

Qualtrics Follow-Up Email No. 1: 26 October 2017

Dear Colleague:

Last week you received an invitation to participate in a study of open enrollment practices being conducted out of the I.U. School of Education. Many of your colleagues have already responded, and I wanted to reach out to you to encourage your participation as well.

Every Indiana school corporation functions within a unique set of circumstances; every district leader approaches those circumstances through the lens of their individual background and values. **Your experiences and expertise are a vital part of understanding how Indiana school districts are responding to increased market-based competition among public schools.**

To that end, I hope you'll take ten minutes of your time to complete the survey provided below. Your anonymous responses will be compiled with those of other Indiana school corporation leaders into a practice brief that highlights how leaders have approached public school choice.

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${1://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

Thanks for your time and attention to this message. Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns. I appreciate your participation in this study, and I look forward to sharing our results with you in the near future.

Cordially,

Cory Irwin
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership
765-960-9048
irwinc@indiana.edu

Qualtrics Follow-Up Email No. 2: 1 November 2017

Dear Colleague:

Hope this message finds you well in the midst of the work week. **The I.U. School of Education's Open Enrolment Survey will close on Wednesday, 8 November.** Over 150 district leaders have already submitted their perspectives to date, and I wanted to reach out one final time to request that you share your expertise on how your school corporation has responded to increased market-based competition among public school districts.

The goal of the survey is to **provide school district leaders with information on how their peers have responded to market-based competition within the unique settings of their individual districts.** The more responses received, the better informed you and your peers will be on this topic. Completing the survey will take **ten minutes or less** and can be done via the links below.

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${l://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

If you've already submitted your responses, please know of the research team's sincerest thanks. If you're yet to respond, please be equally assured of our appreciation in advance.

Best wishes for the continued success of your corporation.

Cordially,

Cory Irwin
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership

Qualtrics Thank You Email: 8 November 2017

Dear Colleague,

I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your recent participation in the I.U. School of Education's study on inter-district open enrollment practices in Indiana. Your willingness to share your experiences and insights with the study group moves us one step closer to understanding how market-based enrollment competition has impacted Indiana's public schools. Results from the study will be analyzed in the coming months, and it is anticipated that the resulting practice brief will be distributed in the spring of 2018.

Best wishes for the remainder of your school year!

Cordially,

Cory Irwin
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:
\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}

APPENDIX D

Guidelines for Designing Web and Mobile Questionnaires

- 9.1: Decide how the survey will be programmed and hosted
- 9.2: Evaluate the technological capabilities of the survey population
- 9.3: Take steps to ensure that questions display similarly across different devices, platforms, browsers, and user settings
- 9.4: Offer a questionnaire optimized for mobile (browser or app based).
- 9.5: Decide how many questions will be presented on each web page and how questions will be arranged.
- 9.6: Create interesting and informative welcome and closing screens that will have wide appeal to respondents
- 9.7: Develop a screen format that emphasizes the respondent rather than the sponsor
- 9.8: Use a consistent page layout across screens and visually emphasize information that is essential to completing the survey while deemphasizing inessential information
- 9.9: Allow respondents to back up in the survey
- 9.10: Do not require responses to questions unless absolutely necessary for the survey
- 9.11: Design survey-specific and item-specific error messages to help respondents troubleshoot any issues they may encounter
- 9.12: Evaluate carefully the use of interactive features, balancing improvements in measurement with the impact on respondent burden
- 9.13: Do not include a graphical progress indicator
- 9.14: Use audiovisual capabilities of the web sparingly, and evaluate the differential effect they may have on respondents
- 9.15: Allow respondents to stop the survey and finish completing it at a later time
- 9.16: Whenever possible, collect paradata that provide feedback on how the respondent interacts with the questionnaire

Guidelines for Web and Mobile Survey Implementation

- 9.17: To the extent possible, personalize all contacts to respondents
- 9.18: Consider sending an incentive electronically with the survey request
- 9.19: Use multiple contacts and vary the message across them
- 9.20: Carefully and strategically time all contacts with the population in mind
- 9.21: Keep e-mail contacts short and to the point
- 9.22: Carefully select the sender name and address and the subject line for email communications
- 9.23: Take steps to ensure that emails are not flagged as spam
- 9.24: Assign each sample member a unique ID number
- 9.25: Work within the capabilities and limits of the web server(s)

Quality Control and Testing Guidelines for Web and Mobile Surveys

- 9.26: Obtain expert review and conduct cognitive interviews, experimental evaluations, and pilot studies of web implementation materials and procedures.
- 9.27: Test the survey using a variety of devices, platforms, connection speeds, browsers, and user-controlled settings, and test the database to ensure that items are collected and coded correctly
- 9.28: Establish a procedure for dealing with bounced emails
- 9.29: Establish procedures for tracking incentives
- 9.30: Establish procedures for dealing with respondent inquiries
- 9.31: Implement a system for monitoring progress and evaluating early completers
- 9.32: Develop procedures to ensure data security

Source: Dillman, D., Smyth, J., and Christian, L. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley. pp. 349-350.

APPENDIX E

Open Enrollment Survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1

Interdistrict Open Enrollment and Indiana Superintendent Practice

Introduction

This survey is being administered to explore the ways in which Indiana superintendents and associate/assistant superintendents have exercised leadership in response to Indiana's open enrollment policies. You will be asked a series of questions regarding enrollment competition and district practices. Answer each question as best you can from memory. Participation is voluntary, and you are free to skip a question or discontinue the survey at any time. Completing the survey should take approximately 10 minutes.

Navigation buttons can be found at the bottom of each page of questions. You can use these buttons to move forward or backward in the survey. When you answer a question, your response will be highlighted to indicate your choice.

Results from this survey will be compiled into a practice brief for distribution to Indiana's school superintendents. If you're ready to start, please click the red forward button at the bottom of the screen.

Page Break

Q2

Defining Open Enrollment and Its Impact on Your Work

The first set of questions in this survey addresses interdistrict open enrollment as it relates to your work broadly. Please answer each question as best you can.

Q3 School choice is a broad term for practices that provide educational options to children and families. These practices can include open enrollment, private/parochial school availability, and charter school options among others.

Considering the type(s) of choice available to students in your corporation, what impact has school choice had on your district?

- ☐ A great impact. (1)
- ☐ Some impact. (2)
- ☐ Little impact. (3)
- ☐ No impact. (4)



Q49 From your perspective, which of the following descriptions identifies your corporation's **primary competitor** for student enrollment?

- ☐ A neighboring public school corporation. (1)
- ☐ Private, non-sectarian schools. (2)
- ☐ Parochial schools. (3)
- ☐ Charter schools. (4)
- ☐ Online learning options. (5)

Q5 Indiana law permits interdistrict open enrollment, which enables school corporations to accept out-of-district transfer students if (a) the district has the capacity to accept additional students and (b) the district can provide the student with a better academic fit than their previous district.

Does your corporation participate in interdistrict open enrollment?

☐ Yes. (1)

☐ No. (2)

Q4 What level of competition for student enrollment do you perceive exists among **public school districts** in your area?

☐ A lot of competition. (1)

☐ Some competition. (2)

☐ Little competition. (3)

☐ No competition. (4)

Display This Question:

If Indiana law permits interdistrict open enrollment, which enables school corporations to accept ou... = Yes.



Q6 What is your district's primary reason for participating in open enrollment?

- ☐ The potential to grow enrollment. (1)
- ☐ The potential to obtain increased state funding. (2)
- ☐ The belief that the district can provide better academic offerings than other districts. (3)
- ☐ The belief that the district can provide a better culture or environment than other districts. (4)
- ☐ Other. Please specify: (5) _____

Display This Question:

If Indiana law permits interdistrict open enrollment, which enables school corporations to accept ou... = No.



Q7 What is your district's primary reason for not participating in open enrollment?

- ☐ Our enrollment is stable. (1)
- ☐ Our enrollment is growing. (2)
- ☐ Our school board has chosen to not pursue the practice. (3)
- ☐ Our community has indicated an unwillingness to pursue the practice. (4)
- ☐ Other. Please specify: (5) _____

Page Break

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Q8

The Practice of Interdistrict Open Enrollment

The next set of questions is designed to help us better understand how enrollment policies are practiced in school corporations. Some questions will limit you to one response. Other questions will permit multiple responses; they will be identified with the words, "Select all that apply." Please answer the questions as best you can from memory.

Q9 Organizations often develop mission and vision statements as a means of explaining why they exist and to provide a compelling image of what the organization hopes to accomplish. Has your district undertaken a process to define its mission and vision?

☐ Yes. (1)

☐ No. (2)

Display This Question:

If Organizations often develop mission and vision statements as a means of explaining why they exist... = Yes.

Q10 Have you or your school board articulated increased enrollment as a goal suitable to pursue under your school corporation's mission?

☐ Yes. (1)

☐ No. (2)



Q11 Has your district used the following practices to determine corporate needs? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Conducted a facilities study. (1)
 - ☐ Conducted an assessment of curriculum and instruction. (2)
 - ☐ Conducted stakeholder focus groups. (3)
 - ☐ Conducted school board planning sessions. (4)
 - ☐ Conducted community forums. (5)
 - ☐ Conducted stakeholder surveys. (6)
 - ☐ None of the above. (7)
-

Q12 During strategic planning, do you consider the actions of neighboring districts when formulating your own policies or practices?

- ☐ Yes. (1)
 - ☐ No. (2)
-

Display This Question:

If During strategic planning, do you consider the actions of neighboring districts when formulating... = Yes.



Q13 What has been your primary means of gathering information on neighboring districts' practices?

- ☐ Through formal study of a neighboring district's policies or practices. (1)
 - ☐ Through anecdotal information provided by community members. (2)
 - ☐ Through participation in superintendent study councils or groups. (3)
 - ☐ Other. Please specify. (4) _____
-

Q14 Does your corporation track the number of students gained or lost due to interdistrict transfers?

- ☐ Yes. (1)
 - ☐ No. (2)
-

Q15 To the best of your knowledge, what percent of your current total enrollment is comprised of out-of-district transfers into your corporation?

- ☐ None. (1)
 - ☐ 1 - 5% (2)
 - ☐ 6 - 10% (3)
 - ☐ 11 - 15% (4)
 - ☐ More than 15% (5)
 - ☐ I am unable to provide an estimate. (6)
-

Q16 Has your corporation explicitly directed funds towards attracting interdistrict transfer students?

☐ Yes. (1)

☐ No. (2)

Display This Question:

If Has your corporation explicitly directed funds towards attracting interdistrict transfer students? = Yes.

Q17 How much money do you estimate you allocate annually?

☐ Less than \$1,000 (1)

☐ \$1,001 - 5,000 (2)

☐ \$5,001 - 10,000 (3)

☐ More than \$10,000 (4)

☐ I am unable to provide an estimate. (5)

Display This Question:

If Has your corporation explicitly directed funds towards attracting interdistrict transfer students? = Yes.



Q18 What has been the source of your funding used to attract interdistrict transfers? Select all that apply.

- ☐ General Fund (1)
 - ☐ Rainy Day Fund (2)
 - ☐ School Foundation (3)
 - ☐ Grant or Donor Funding (4)
 - ☐ Other. Please specify. (5) _____
-

Q19 Are district or building-level administrators expected to develop local resources (i.e. facilities, programs, courses, etc.) with the intent of increasing enrollment?

- ☐ Yes (1)
 - ☐ No (2)
-

Q20 Are any community partners -- like area businesses or civic organizations -- engaged in providing input on policy development or pursuing improvements that might make your school corporation more attractive to open enrollment participants?

- ☐ Yes (1)
 - ☐ No (2)
-

Q21 Has increasing transfer student enrollment impacted decisions related to capital projects, instructional technology integration, or other district improvement practices?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Page Break

End of Block: Block 1

Start of Block: Block 2

Q22

Enrollment Strategies and Strategy Implementation

The questions that follow ask you whether or not your corporation has employed certain strategies to maintain or increase student enrollment. Please read through each set of options carefully and select all that apply.



Q23 Sometimes corporations will update or modify school board policies relative to maintaining or increasing enrollment. Has your corporation modified the following policy areas in relation to open enrollment? Select all that apply.

☐ Established or modified district enrollment caps. (1)

☐ Established or modified class enrollment caps. (2)

☐ Increased transportation availability or routes. (3)

☐ None of the above. (4)



Q24 Has your district undertaken the following practices in response to maintaining or increasing open enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Increased the number of student clubs. (1)
 - ☐ Increased the number of arts programs. (2)
 - ☐ Increased the number of community service programs. (3)
 - ☐ Increased the number of sports. (4)
 - ☐ Improved extra-curricular facilities, like theaters, gymnasiums, weight rooms, or athletic fields. (5)
 - ☐ Expanded extra-curricular facilities, like theaters, gymnasiums, weight rooms, or athletic fields. (6)
 - ☐ Undertaken other steps related to athletics and extra-curricular options. (7)
 - ☐ None of the above. (8)
-



Q25 Has your district undertaken the following practices in response to maintaining or increasing enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Adjusted curricular or instructional practices to improve accountability metrics, like test scores or graduation rates. (1)
- ☐ Introduced or increased access to career and technical education programs. (2)
- ☐ Increased use of or access to instructional technology or computer resources. (3)
- ☐ Introduced or increased access to Advanced Placement or dual-credit courses. (4)
- ☐ Introduced or increased access to special academic programs, like dual-language immersion or engineering options. (5)
- ☐ Introduced or increased access to flexible learning environments, like online academies or alternative schools. (6)
- ☐ None of the above. (7)

Page Break



Q26 Has your district undertaken the following practices in response to maintaining or increasing enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Developed building-specific or district-wide communication plans. (1)
- ☐ Shared information with district staff and families with the intention it be distributed by word-of-mouth. (2)
- ☐ Made improvements to your district website. (3)
- ☐ Advertised in print, digital, or other media outlets. (4)
- ☐ Created or enhanced your district's social media presence on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. (5)
- ☐ Hosted open houses or school visitation programs. (6)
- ☐ Distributed mailings or leaflets about your schools or district. (7)
- ☐ Provided incentives to staff, students, or families who referred potential students/families to your district. (8)
- ☐ None of the above. (9)



Q27 When communicating with the public, has your district done the following in response to maintaining or increasing enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Emphasized accountability metrics, like test scores, graduation rates, or state letter grades. (1)
- ☐ Emphasized student or teacher accomplishments, awards, or successes. (2)
- ☐ Emphasized available programs or resources, like special academic pathways or athletic programs. (3)
- ☐ Emphasized connections to other institutions, like colleges, community institutions, or businesses. (4)
- ☐ Emphasized a particular theme, like "excellence" or "tradition" or "innovation." (5)
- ☐ Emphasized online school rankings, like those produced by US News and World Report or Niche.com. (6)
- ☐ None of the above. (7)



Q28 Has your district undertaken the following in response to maintaining or increasing enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Built new partnerships with businesses. (1)
 - ☐ Built new partnerships with higher education institutions. (2)
 - ☐ Coordinated increased student access to resources via local agencies. (3)
 - ☐ Instituted or expanded student internship opportunities. (4)
 - ☐ Undertaken other steps not listed related to partnerships. (5)
 - ☐ None of the above. (6)
-



Q29 Has your district undertaken the following in response to maintaining or increasing enrollment? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Consulted with or employed a marketing professional. (1)
 - ☐ Consulted with or employed a public relations professional. (2)
 - ☐ Hired staff to conduct district communications practices. (3)
 - ☐ Reassigned existing staff to conduct district communications practices. (4)
 - ☐ Added communications responsibilities to administrative duties. (5)
 - ☐ None of the above. (6)
-

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Q30 Does your corporation collect data on why students move into or out of your district?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

Display This Question:

*If Does your corporation collect data on why students move into or out of your district? =
Yes*

Q31 How is this information gathered? Select all that apply.

☐ Surveying students or families about factors impacting their mobility. (1)

☐ Interviewing students or families about factors impacting their mobility. (2)

☐ Receiving anecdotal information from school staff, like principals or guidance counselors, on reasons for student mobility. (3)

☐ Other. Please specify. (4) _____

Q32 Does your corporation use student mobility data to inform district planning?

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

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Q33

Sharing Your Expertise

As the survey draws to a close, we wanted to give you an opportunity to share your thoughts on effective enrollment practices or the concept of interdistrict open enrollment in general. These open-ended questions give you a chance to share your expert opinion and will provide context to your earlier answers.

Q34 In regards to your corporation's enrollment goals, what three practices have you found most beneficial in maintaining or increasing enrollment?

☐ Practice 1. (1) _____

☐ Practice 2. (2) _____

☐ Practice 3. (3) _____

Q35 Do you have any other thoughts on the practice of interdistrict open enrollment that were not covered by the questions in this survey? If so, please feel free to share.

Q48 How long have you served in your current leadership role?

- ☐ One year or less. (1)
- ☐ Two to five years. (2)
- ☐ Six to ten years. (3)
- ☐ More than ten years. (4)
-

Q36 Would you be willing to provide more information or talk one-on-one with a researcher at another date, either to further inform this study or future studies on interdistrict open enrollment practices?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)
-

Display This Question:

If Would you be willing to provide more information or talk one-on-one with a researcher at another... = Yes

Q37 Please provide your contact information.

- ☐ Name. (1) _____
- ☐ Corporation. (2) _____
- ☐ Email or Phone Number. (3) _____
-

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership Indiana University School of Education, Bloomington, Indiana Dissertation Title: "Indiana Superintendent Response to Interdistrict Open Enrollment" Advisor: Professor Suzanne Eckes	May 2018
Master of Science, Strategic Management Indiana University Kelley School of Business, Bloomington, Indiana	December 2016
Administrative Licensure, Urban Principal Program Indiana University School of Education, Indianapolis, Indiana	July 2013
Master of Education, Secondary Education University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana	May 2008
Bachelor of Arts, American Studies University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana	May 2005
Language Immersion, Centre International d'Etudes Françaises Université Catholique de l'Ouest, Angers, France	2002-2003

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Principal, Bloomington High School North Monroe County Community School Corporation Bloomington, Indiana	2017-Present
Assistant Principal, Central Middle School Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation Columbus, Indiana	2014-2017
English Teacher, Richmond High School Richmond Community Schools Richmond, Indiana	2008-2014
Teacher/AmeriCorps Volunteer, St. John's Catholic School Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee Pensacola, Florida	2006-2008
Clerk, Elmer J. George, Attorney-at-Law Lebanon, Kentucky	2005-2006

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation Summer UDL Institute Columbus, Indiana	2014 to 2016
Harvard Graduate School of Education UDL Institute Cambridge, Massachusetts	Summer 2015
Parental Choice Symposium Notre Dame, Indiana	Summer 2009

HONORS AND AWARDS

Educational Administration Scholarship AASA, The Superintendents Association	2018
Fulbright-Hays Group Study Abroad, Israel and Jordan United States Department of Education	2010
Segal AmeriCorps Education Award Corporation for National and Community Service	2006, 2007

PUBLICATIONS

Eckes, S., Fetter-Harrott, A. & Irwin, C. (2016). Legal matters: Culture and curriculum challenges in the classroom. *Principal Leadership*.